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City of Blood

An Adventure for 7th-level PCs

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Stormreach is a city held together by blood. On the edge of a savage land, it clings to the coast like a tick, sucking the spoils and splendors of Xen'drik to survive. Ships flock to the city, leaving laden with rare treasures dug from ancient vaults where they've hidden from daylight for thousands of years. But some secrets are best left undisturbed.

"City of Blood" is an adventure for a party of four 7th-level PCs set in the Eberron setting, in the ruin-wrought city of Stormreach. The adventure is best served by a well-balanced party with at least one PC possessed of an inquisitive's skill-set, and another who is good at talking with and interrogating those they meet.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

"City of Blood" makes use of the *Player's Handbook* (*PH*), *Dungeon Master's Guide* (*DMG*), and *Monster Manual* (*MM*). Additionally, abbreviations indicate materials that appear in other supplements. Those supplements and their abbreviations are as follows: *Eberron Campaign Setting* (*ECS*), *Expanded Psionics Handbook* (*XPH*), and *Libris Mortis* (*LM*).

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

When explorers discovered a strange tomb in the savage heart of Xen'drik, they quickly plundered its treasures and packed them off to the coast. The tomb's sole occupant—an ornate mummified corpse wrapped in bejeweled scarves and soaked in spice—found his way to Stormreach. Death follows with him.

Thousands of years ago during the dismal reign of the blood-drinking cabalists of the Qabalrin, a necromantic overlord named Kaardral wrought a mask of vile power from the blood-weeping wood of the white heart trees surrounding the ancient Oasis of Blood in the Menechtarun. The *Blood Mask* proved as voracious as its master. It turned whole villages to husk-strewn wastelands with its evil thirst. Eventually it consumed the life's blood of its maker in a ravenous frenzy. The *Blood Mask* vanished, passing from victim to victim, and eventually the relic laid dormant for thousands of years, with no wearer worthy enough to satisfy its bloody cravings.

Kaardral was reduced to a desiccated husk by the mask, but his evil would not die. Slowly he reconstituted his form as best he could, feeding on the juices of his slaves, and becoming a thing of parched dust and anguish. The

thirst of the *Blood Mask* became his eternal curse to bear. The last of his slaves wrought a vessel for his crumbled body—an hourglass where his sand-shifting form rests until it can feed again. The hourglass was interred along with one of Kaardral's slaves, who was buried with all the honors and treasures his master's ruined body could not bear. Beneath the sand Kaardral waited for an age, but a week ago, the necromancer saw daylight for the first time in a thousand years. His slave's tomb was breached by gold-hungry explorers, and pillaged to the last coin—they even took the jewel-encrusted mummy of his slave and his hourglass reliquary back to Stormreach for sale. Now Kaardral's thirst is awakened, and worse, the tomb raiders who brought him to Stormreach put the desiccated necromancer in reach of his beloved mask. United, the relic and its sick master's combined thirst shall be insatiate. The entire populace of Stormreach will bleed its last to quench it.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The recently uncovered mummy and its earthly treasures find a home in the estate of a wealthy elven antiquities dealer named Varan Starseeker. The murders begin shortly thereafter, starting with Varan's manservant and then his librarian. Vexed at the mysterious disappearances of several of his servants and listening with dread as eye witnesses report a mummified corpse skulking the manor halls in the dead of night, Varan hires the PCs to get to the bottom of these cryptic events plaguing the elf's estate.

Varan's troubles come not in single spies but in battalions. As soon as the party arrives at the old elf's manor, the estate is attacked by a band of daring thieves who seek several pieces of note in Varan's collection of antiquities. The PCs repulse or crush the raiders battling amongst ancient suits of armor, displays of ancient weapons, and taxidermy nightmares, not to mention priceless vases and stonework tablets predating Lhazaar's sojourn from Sarlona. When the dust settles, and the bandits are defeated, the PCs learn they were hired by a shadowy patron who owns and operates a tumbledown tavern and pit fighting establishment in Forgelight, called the Broken Link.

From here the PCs have a few options: They can continue to investigate the strange murders around the estate involving the cursed mummy. Otherwise they may choose to investigate whatever shadowy forces backed the raider's play for Varan's goods.

If they attempt to unravel the curse of the mummy, the party soon learns the desiccated corpse is not a chieftain or priest-king, but rather the body of a simple slave dressed in honors. The true threat—the form-shifting undead necromancer Kaardral, hides in the antiquated hourglass among the mummy's possessions. Seeping out to murder furtively when those nearby are least aware, Kaardral is interested in killing (and in the nourishment the blood of his victims grants him), but more importantly he seeks a greater prize. Kaardral prowls Varan's ample library by night searching for any clue of the whereabouts of his beloved mask. To Kaardral's delight he discovered amongst Varan's ledgers that the mask was recently acquired by the old elf.

But the mask is long gone—absconded with during the raiders' botched attempt at plundering Varan's estate. The man who hired them is none other than the Stirge—Stormreach's most accomplished cat burglar and a thief with an eye for art history and a reputation for chicanery and misdirection. The raiders' assault was nothing more than a distraction. During their clumsy attack on the West Wing of Varan's estate, the Stirge slipped by the meager defense on the East Wing and replaced Varan's white wooden tribal mask with a clever fake.

The sand in the hourglass soon vanishes, and the murder rate on the streets of Stormreach begins to rise. Half the victims are turned to dust, and the others are reduced to withered bloodless husks. The blood-drinking mask, now worn by the Stirge (and giving his moniker a new gruesome meaning), and Kaardral's shifting sand-form prowl the night seeking fresh victims and one another. If the party doesn't find them before they join forces, Stormreach faces annihilation in the wake of their unholy thirst.

One among the Shrouds, a young initiate named Kelembra, barely more than a child, has bit off far more than she can chew. Coming across a band of half-giants, all members of a rival gang called the Titans, Kelembra scampered up a wall in the Marketplace and toppled an open keg of kuryeva atop one of their heads. The furious Titans chased Kelembra through the markets, toppling stalls and tents as they moved, where they snatched up makeshift clubs. They've cornered the young elf and plan to beat her within an inch of her life unless some heroes happening by intervene on her behalf.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Hooking the PCs into the adventure is a simple task; Varan's household is upset by mysterious deaths and he seeks brave adventurers to investigate. He recently acquired the services of a half-orc inquisitive, but the

detective vanished shortly after he was engaged. He went missing while he was surveying the estate (another victim of Kaardral).

Varan may have heard of the PCs' exploits through his many connections among explorers and the like, and he could send the PCs a missive begging their them to visit his estate in the Whitewash neighborhood of Oldgate District. If you wish to add more personal motivations for answering the summons or getting involved in City of Blood, choose any or all of the following.

Old Family Debt: Varan is an elderly retiree now, but he once served Aundair in the Last War, and, during several campaigns as an officer, he made several friends. Perhaps one of the PCs' mothers or fathers fought alongside the Aundairian elf in the old days, and Varan saved the parent's skin on more than one occasion.

Lore of the Blood Cults: A wizard PC or anyone with an interest in Xen'drik's history or lore may wish to gain access to Varan's copious texts and relics in his extensive collection.

Disappeared Friend: One of the servants in Varan's employ who has vanished was a good friend or relative of a PC. Perhaps the half-orc inquisitive employed to unravel the mystery of Varan's estate was an ally or ex-lover of a PC. If a PC is an inquisitive, perhaps the half-orc was an old competitor who shared an amicable professional rivalry with her. If a PC is affiliated with House Tharashk, then make the half-orc inquisitive a member of the House as well, and the PCs are looking into his disappearance.

PROLOGUE

Stormreach is a twisted web of powers and politics, not just between the machinating storm lords, but also between the shadowy organizations and gangs who rule the smaller provinces of the city's murderous back alleys and blood-stained docks. Whether your party is from Stormreach or are recent arrivals, navigating the blade-ridden shadows of Stormreach's underworld is no affair for the foolish or those without allies among its denizens.

SHROUDS

The following encounter offers the PCs a chance to gain a powerful ally among a dangerous gang called the Shrouds, one of the city's oldest surviving organizations of illicit intent. The Shrouds often grapple with other gangs of note and have engaged in a perilous and long-standing rivalry with the Bilge Rats, Stormreach's most murderous gang whose stranglehold on the docks of Harbor has gone unquestioned for decades. The Shrouds are an all-elven gang who engage in ritualistic self-mutilation and strange necromantic practices, not unlike the Stillborn of Aerenal, though it is unclear what connection the gang has to them, if any. For more information on the Shrouds, see page 72 in *City of Stormreach*.

If the PCs came to Kelembra's aid here, her gang remembers and repays the debt. The most timely moment for their intervention on the PCs behalf is in Encounter CB6, when the party is ambushed by the Bilge Rats in the dank and shadowy Underdocks. However, if at any other time in the adventure you feel the party gets out of their depth or risks extermination at the hands of their opposition, feel free to have the Shrouds lend a helping hand. Most of the Shrouds are elves who have peeled away pieces of their face or necrotized their flesh with alchemical concoctions. They do count among their number a few wraiths of their fallen allies who spurn the light of day and hide from onlookers. You could have the Shrouds and their deathly members come to the party's aid in battle, or even offer information if the PCs are stumped by a turn in their investigations during "City of Blood."

Tactical Encounter: Marketplace Throwdown (page 15).

CHAPTER 1: THE MYSTERY OF THE STARSEEKER ESTATE

Varan Starseeker, son of a military family with a long line of heroes, was a commander in Aundair's armies during the Last War, and he led his troops to countless victories. However during the campaign that resulted in the Eldeen Reaches' secession from Aundair, Starseeker was scapegoated by his superiors as the failure who "allowed" this loss of territory to ensue. He was expelled from military service and went into self exile in Stormreach, where he pursued the only thing he loved more than stratagems and battlefield maneuvers—history. Varan used his considerable family fortune to purchase a sizeable estate in the Whitewash neighborhood of Oldgate district and then set to purchasing relics and tomes of lore. Varan's most recent find has proved more trouble than its worth. Since the arrival of the mummy (and its effects), Varan's serving staff has dwindled.

Eventually Varan summons the PCs to his estate at a late hour of the evening. He is elderly, even by elven

standards, and he moves slowly though he still possesses poise and grace. His silver hair is pulled back, his face is noble but worn with age, and his blue eyes remain sharp. He dresses in finery of muted colors and foregoes needless adornments or jewelry.

Varan awaits them with an everbright lantern in hand at the doors to his sprawling villa. He greets them cordially but is obviously uneasy to be back at his estate (he vacated it a few days ago after the sellswords he hired to protect the place fled in terror). Varan leads the PCs to a grand receiving room, which is filled with glass displays exhibiting historical pieces from Xen'drik's varied past civilizations. Once the PCs are assembled in his majestic receiving room, Varan thanks the party for coming and explains his situation:

Read or paraphrase the following:

"This past week a strangeness settled in about my home. At first it seemed a phantom my imagination. Shadows crept around of their own accord with no flicker of the candle flame to urge them on. An utterance, more like a moan, echoed in the dead of night through my halls, gone before my mind could discern whether I truly heard it at all. Then my librarian disappeared. Old Kavros, my manservant, was next. Suspecting foul play, I hired a few reliable swords to stalk the halls, but they went missing last night. My other servants have fled now—they say this place is cursed. They may be right. The strangeness' onset coincides with a recent acquisition I made. The mummified remains of an elven chieftain of antiquity was unearthed in Menechtarun and brought to Stormreach with the contents of his death vault. I purchased him and his accoutrements for a special exhibit to ancient Xen'drik culture. Since this mummy entered my halls, a pall has fallen upon my happy home. I need you to get to the bottom of this elusive curse."

Varan is willing to pay the PCs 5,000 gp for expunging the cause of his troubles, though a DC 25 Diplomacy check allows him to increase his offer by the gift of a 5,000 gp magic relic from his collection. Shortly after negotiations are concluded and Varan offers further refreshments from his well-supplied wall bar, the meeting is unceremoniously interrupted.

BELZAR'S DISTRACTION

Belzar Stoutarm, miscreant halfling explorer and armed-robbery aficionado, arrives shortly after the PCs with the intention of plundering Varan's estate, now that the elf's hired sellswords and serving staff are unaccounted for. Stoutarm recruited a fistful of half-orc toughs (all rejects from House Tharashk) to help him lug off the loot, but he does not expect a contingent of armed adventurers to be sipping brandy with his prey. He is caught unawares but has no intention of backing down.

Tactical Encounter: Mayhem at Midnight (page 18).

Further Development: After the PCs repulse Belzar and his goons, Varan's level of gratitude relates directly to how much havoc was wrought upon his collection. If his attitude has been shifted to unfriendly, he offers no further compensation to the party and grows cold, urging them to expunge the curse on his house as soon as possible and be gone. If his attitude is friendly, he shows his gratitude by paying the PCs an additional 1,000 gp per party member if they succeed. If his attitude is helpful, he immediately gifts each PC with a minor magic item of 2,000 gp or less.

FORK IN THE ROAD

The PCs have a couple of options regarding how to proceed after their encounter at the Varan estate. They may chalk up Belzar's attack to a random act of thuggery and focus their attentions on the task Varan set before them: discovering the cause of his estate's curse. Alternatively, the party may wish to investigate Belzar's robbery.

PATH 1: CURSE OF THE MUMMY

If the PCs opt to investigate the troubling disappearances at Varan's estate, they may go about it any way they see fit. Varan is willing to show them to the exhibit hall where he keeps his new mummy. He hasn't gone near this hall since he began to suspect the disappearances were linked to his acquisition. In fact, tonight is the first time he has set foot in his estate in days. He has faced enemies on the battlefield and even braved the undead legions of Karrnathi, but he cannot hide his trepidation of the mummy. The lights installed in the hallways near the mummy's exhibit inexplicably went dead a few days past and now Varan leads the way though the darkened corridors of his cavernous estate with a small hand-held beacon whose flickering flame sets the shadows dancing and twisting around the party. Eventually the party reaches the murky hall where the mummy lairs.

Read them the following:

The hall is thick with shadows, and the pungent scents of anise, cinnamon, saffron, and other more exotic scents

pervade the room. A sarcophagus, gilded with gold, sits upon a dais. Within it is a corpse with withered arms folded upon its deathly still chest—strips of preserved cloth are wrapped around it everywhere but on its shriveled face. The skin on the face looks like lacquered wood, and its black stubby teeth are exposed to the air. Its hollow eyes glare up at the ceiling as though the face of its killer is painted upon it. A low shelf nearby displays the mummy's belongings in life: a comb of jade, a silver chalice, an hourglass of smoky glass and bronze, and a carved idol of a scorpion wrought in obsidian.

Creature: The mummy is not Kaardral, but rather the inanimate and totally dead (not undead) albeit well-preserved corpse of one of his slaves, dressed in the regalia his inconstant form could not support. Kaardral is present though, observing the party of adventurers from within his hourglass reliquary, choosing to remain dormant in order to gather intelligence concerning this new potential threat or prey.

Clues: Once the PCs overcome their hesitation, finish any wasted turning attempts on the mummy, or exhaust themselves hacking at the corpse, they may wish to examine it. Anyone succeeding on a DC 25 Heal, Search, or Knowledge (history) check reveals that the bone structure of the corpse is definitely not that of a member of royalty or a warrior. The bones show skeletal damage inflicted by years of back-breaking labor. Additionally, the mummy's preserved leathery flesh shows a strange ugly scar upon its chest, which is no mark of royalty but rather the tell-tale brand of a slave.

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Investigations are twofold. One element is the gathering of clues, and the other is interviewing witnesses or experts who may offer insights to an event. Sadly most of the witnesses to Kaardral's predations are dead and turned to so much dust. Varan, however, can offer some insights if the PCs prompt him with the right questions:

Who Disappeared? "The first to vanish was Jasper, my librarian, a fellow campaigner from the War who retired here with me to serve as my loremaster. He went into the library to conduct some research and never came out. We found tomes opened and parchment unrolled. Next was Old Karvos, my manservant. He went to the kitchens to fetch me some tea and never returned."

Did Anyone See or Hear Anything? "A few of the other servants, who have since abandoned my estate,

claimed to hear noises in the dark, something almost hissing or slithering about the corridors, sometimes very close. But they saw nothing."

Beyond the information above, Varan has little useful information. He has never seen anything himself either, though he admits to feeling a sinister presence whenever he's in the mummy exhibit. If the PCs decide to investigate the sites of the disappearances, they may do so.

The Kitchens

Varan's kitchens were once resplendent with all manner of exotic spices and foods (he is as much a connoisseur of food as he is of antiquities) and bustling with cook fires and chefs. Now it is cold and barren, with only left-over staples and a wheel of crusty old cheese and stale bread.

Clues: Old Karvos was fetching sugar in the pantry when Kaardral descended on him and drained him to dust. The mummy then knocked over a large jar of sugar to cover the scattered sand left behind by Karvos' body. A DC 25 Search check made here detects another substance among the sugar: a dusty fine-grained sand.

The Library

Varan's library is impressive: It has three levels and is filled with warrens of shelves and stacked books (his collection grows faster than Jasper could keep up). Nothing has been disturbed since Jasper vanished inside, and tomes are strewn across the top of the table at which he was working. A small clay pot of white powder is overturned near the books as well, its contents strewn about. The powder is an alchemical mixture used to keep parchment preserved. Jasper, after examining the new mummy exhibit, immediately grew suspicious of the markings on the sarcophagus (he had read about the Qabalrin before). He went to the library that very night to track down the exact information on the horrid blood cult, but right after he found the texts he needed, Kaardral struck.

Clues: Anyone succeeding on a DC 25 Search or Craft (alchemy) check notices that some other sort of dust is strewn about and that it intermingled with the white preservation powder. This sand is the leavings of Jasper as well as traces of Kaardral's dusty form. Additionally, anyone who takes particular interest in the tomes may make a DC 20 Decipher Script check. Success grants them the ability to translate the tomes' contents, all of which are concerned with ancient elven blood cults of Xen'drik. One of them makes mention of an ancient mask whose thirst for blood wrought destruction on entire villages. The mask is none other than the *Blood Mask*, and a vague history of Kaardral as its creator, who was destroyed by it ("reduced to bloodless dust"), is discovered by any PC who succeeded on the previous check and takes two days to study the text in great detail. Anyone who has conducted a search of the entire estate immediately recognizes a relic mask in the West Wing exhibit hall whose description matches the mask mentioned in the texts. If they show the text to Varan, he immediately recognizes the mask as well.

Anyone who studied the text and succeeds at a second Decipher Script check (DC 25) notes a cipher hidden in the text that reveals how the mask can be removed from a wearer without first killing her. To do so, the victim must be pinned, and then holy water applied liberally to a silver blade, which must be used to carve the mask off its host's face. No other means short of killing the host dislodges the evil item.

The Fake Mask

If the PCs decipher the old tomes Jasper was looking over before his death, they may investigate the mask immediately, but if not, they most likely return here after interrogating Talon.

Either way, when they do so read them the following:

What seems like ivory at first glance is revealed to be chalk white wood of unknown origin, but one thing's for certain—no natural wood known to man appears this pure white without aid of varnish. The mask's eyes are more like two protruding mosquito proboscises jutting from this thing's malignant face. Beneath these thirsty eyes lies a maw filled with jagged daggerlike teeth, and each is hollow at its point.

The mask in this display case, however, is not the true *Blood Mask*, but rather a clever fake wrought by Stormreach's famed Hollow Shard forgers. A larcenous cat burglar, going by the moniker "The Stirge," commissioned this forgery, and it is his expert hands that cracked the seal on the display case here and absconded with the true *Blood Mask* after erasing any trace of his crime.

Any PC whoexamines the mask discovers the forgery with a successful DC 20 Search or Knowledge (history) check. Anyone examining the exhibit hall in the West Wing and succeeds on a DC 25 Search check notices traces of a very professional breaking and entering (the Stirge removed a glass plate in the stained glass dome in the ceiling, lowered himself in on a silk cord, and replaced the mask).

Kaardral

Kaardral learned of Jasper's interest in the *Blood Mask* when he killed the scholar in the library and examined the texts laid out there. He did not realize the mask was actually located at Varan's estate until after the Stirge replaced it with a forgery. Once Kaardral learns the mask is no longer here, he leaves the estate. If the PCs put together the clue of the fine grain sand present in both the kitchens and the library, they may return to the mummy exhibit and inspect the hourglass reliquary there.

If you want to reward their good detective work, go ahead and allow the party to encounter Kaardral here (see Encounter 9 for his stats). As soon as anyone gives the hourglass too close a scrutiny for Kaardral's comfort, the mummy explodes out of the hourglass, sending a hail of glass at anyone within 10 feet (1d6 points of slashing damage, DC 15 Reflex save for half). Kaardral has no interest in battling the PCs here; his true goal is to find his mask and feed on enough easy

prey to reconstitute his humanoid form indefinitely. He may hurl a spell or two at the party to make them think twice of trying to follow him, but afterward he turns to sand and blows away on the wind, or creeps into the sewers where he cannot be detected easily.

If the PCs did not find the sand in the kitchens or library, and if they take no special interest in the hourglass reliquary, Kaardral simply slips away in the night. The next time the PCs inspect the reliquary, they note the hourglass is empty—its sands have mysteriously vanished.

PATH 2: A ROBBERY GONE WRONG

If the PCs decide to investigate the attempted robbery at the Varan's estate, they soon learn that Belzar's attack was no accident. The Talon, a minor crime lord of note in Stormreach, hired Belzar to hit the estate as a distraction so his true agent, the Stirge, could slip away with the *Blood Mask*. Though unaware of the full story of the *Blood Mask*, the Talon works for powerful members of the Emerald Claw who seek out the mask for their own fell purposes. The theft of the mask did not go exactly as the Emerald Claw hoped.

Though their plan was successful, shortly after the Stirge claimed the mask, he cut his hand on a jagged roof top. Later when handling the mask, his blood spilt upon it, reviving its powers and awakening the hungry evil inside it. The mask quickly subsumed the Stirge's soul and turned his body into a blood-drinking puppet. Needless to say, he never delivered the *Blood Mask* to the Talon. The Talon has been hunting his wayward cat burglar, but with no success. The Stirge went underground and has been preying on the transients, drunken dock workers, and homeless vagrants all around the Harbor. For the most part, his predations have gone unnoticed. The Emerald Claw is now hunting him all across Stormreach, but with no success.

Tracking the Talon

The Talon is a consummate professional and a powerful mover and shaker in Stormreach's underworld. Normally when the Talon handles a delicate operation, whether a terrorist act, sabotage, or larceny, he usually eliminates all loose ends and avoids detection. This time, things have gotten away from him. When the Stirge vanished, the Talon was forced to break his protocols. He has agents all over the streets and word is out that the Talon has a bounty on the famed cat burglar.

Under normal circumstances the PCs would have a difficult time tracking down the Talon. Now, learning the particulars of the attack on Varan's estate is a simple matter of picking apart why the Talon has his cat's paws hunting for the Stirge. PCs may make Gather Information checks and earn bonuses if any of the investigative actions below are taken. However, some of the actions also offer the Talon a bonus to learning that someone is prying into his affairs and if he succeeds on his check, it greatly affects Encounter 3 (The Broken Link).

Following the Blood: If the PCs ask around about the Emerald Claw or Blood of Vol specifically, give them a +5 bonus on their Gather Information checks. This definitely makes waves and grants the Talon a +10 bonus on his check unless the PCs do their best to cover up their investigations (disguising themselves, investigating under a fake identity, using others as go-betweens, or similar precautions).

Second Story Suspects: If the PCs ask around about cat burglars of exceptional skill, give them a +5 bonus on any Gather Information checks they make while investigating this angle. This line of investigation does not tip off anyone too much since the Talon already has dozens of hired goons out looking for the Stirge and most people just assume the party is working with or for him.

Fake Artifacts Blackmarket: If the PCs ask about a recently made forgery of a relic, they get no bonus, though their digging does gain some attention, giving the Talon a +5 bonus on his own Gather Information check. If the PCs ask around about a mask or even mention it when inquiring with people, they grant the Talon an additional +5 bonus on his check. (No one besides himself and the Stirge himself knew anything about the specific item. All the Talon's agents know is that the Stirge stole something for their employer, but they don't know what.)

Once the PCs decide on the scope of their investigations, allow them to roll a Gather Information check and consult the following results:

DC 10: Someone has several operatives scouring the streets looking for a thief who apparently went missing.

DC 15: The missing thief is the Stirge, one of Stormreach's most skilled cat burglars, and he is now hunted by dozens of operatives who report to someone called the Talon. The Stirge apparently has something the Talon wants very badly. Rumors abound that the Talon works for the Emerald Claw.

DC 20: The Talon arranged an attack on the Varan Estate as part of a plot to steal an ancient mask from Starseeker's collection. The Stirge used the attack as

cover to replace the mask with a forgery, but apparently he never delivered it to the Talon and is now underground. The Talon is a crime lord, whose real identity is unknown, though it's rumored that those looking for him can find the Talon at a tavern in Forgelight called the Broken Link.

DC 25: The Talon is an elf, a former pit fighter, and badly scarred in countless battles. He owns and operates the Broken Link.

DC 30: The Talon is a high-ranking agent of the Order of the Emerald Claw who reports directly to the White Raven. The Emerald Claw is searching for a powerful artifact called the Blood Mask, but the Stirge has gone into hiding with the relic.

The Talon Knows All, Sees All

The Talon has survived years of criminality in Stormreach by keeping his ear to the ground. His spies are everywhere and most undesirables in Stormreach know they can earn a few more coppers for Kuryeva by reporting any interesting tidbits they overheard in the alleys to the bouncers at the Broken Link. Once the PCs are done conducting their investigations, give the Talon a DC 20 Gather Information check of his own (adjusting it for any bonuses received while the PCs investigated). If the check succeeds, the Talon knows all about the PCs digging into his affairs and learns enough about the PCs to identify them on sight. If this is the case, the Talon takes extra precautions and reinforces his tavern with a slew of armed guards to deal with the party when they arrive. See Encounter 3 for details.

The Broken Link

Notorious for its vicious spiked chain pit fights (of which the Talon is the reigning champion), the Broken Link is a local favorite among the more mean-spirited smiths and toughs in the sooty Forgelight District. The tavern is located in a particularly ruinous section of the district, surrounded by cracked pillars and ancient well-worn walls and structures dating back to Stormreach's earlier civilizations. The streets are safe (or at least as safe as any in Stormreach) but the nooks, rooftops, and stretches of broken walls above are prowled by all manner of predators. The PCs learn this the hard way

if they are forced to chase the Talon across the rooftops (see Encounters 4 and 5).

Tactical Encounter: Battle at the Broken Link (page 20).

Tactical Encounter: Rooftop Chase (page 22).

Tactical Encounter: Pillar Battle (page 25).

When the PCs turn up at the Broken Link, read or paraphrase the following:

Heavy smoke hangs in the air and the raucous cheers of the crowd echo through this large tavern. Beyond the doors, ale-stained tables chipped in a dozen brawls are arranged around a sunken pit with pillars of thick oak, which appear to be chewed by constant melee, spread throughout. Within the pit a half-orc and a burly dwarf are locked in furious combat, much to the delight of the onlooking crowd. Both warriors spin spiked chains at terrifying speeds, whirling them at one another. The dwarf ducks behind a pillar and watches as the half-orc's chain wraps around the heavy wood, rending splinters from its surface. The dwarf spins from behind cover and lets his own chain fly, snarling in triumph as it wraps the half-orc's throat. The dwarf drops his considerable weight and pulls hard, opening his adversary's arteries messily. The crowd roars anew.

See Encounter 3 for details on the Broken Link and the Talon.

Intermission

If you are running "City of Blood" as a long-term campaign set in Stormreach, a good point at which to have an intermission of sorts is after Kaardral vacates Varan's Estate and the PCs run into a dead end with the Talon. Allow them to take a break from this adventure and give the PCs some downtime or maybe let them plan a

BLOODY MURDER

If the PCs decide to investigate specific cases of exsanguinations or disappearances, offer them the following scenes and clues:

Panderer's Lament: Horkato, a low-life half-elf pimp who profits off of desperate widows and orphan girls, whom he recruits as prostitutes, has already lost four girls along the waterfront in Harbor. Their bodies were withered, and their blood was drained from horrible puckered wounds on their face. Horkato gathered the bodies up to give them a pauper's funeral, and he'll gladly show them to any PC who displays a genuine interest in stopping the "vampire" from preying on his girls.

Clues: A successful DC 20 Search or Heal check reveals that the wounds on the girl's faces match exactly the proboscis eyes and toothy maw of the *Blood Mask*.

Soot and Sand: A number of the hard-working chimney sweeps in Stormreach are missing. PCs investigating find a soot-covered old dwarf named Grannis who's terrified to go back to the roofs. He witnessed one of his associates' murders, claiming a wave of sand overwhelmed his associate and sucked the blood from him before reducing his body to nothing but dust and tattered clothing.

Clues: Besides the above eyewitness account, Grannis kept very close track of the murders and shows the PC on a map of Stormreach that the murderer is moving toward the Harbor.

Bloody Soup Kitchen: Bethra, an old gnome spinster, runs a soup kitchen for Stormreach's ever-growing army of homeless vagrants. She has noticed several of her regulars' absence over the past few days and she gladly tells the PCs what she knows, hoping to put a stop to these brutal crimes.

Clues: Bethra has overheard several of the homeless who've witnessed murders. Some say a man in a white mask is responsible, while others claim it is a man made of living blood-red sand. Additionally others, who hang out on the waterfront or underneath the docks of the Harbor, claim to have seen "shark-faced fishmen" dragging victims into the chummy surf beneath the docks. Anyone who talks to the soup kitchen regulars and succeeds on a DC 20 Gather Information check realizes that the most recent reports feature these fishmen more than the masked man or the sand creature. Kaardral and the Blood Mask have gone to ground in an old sea complex of sea caves. A cabal of Devourer-worshiping sahuagin who reside in the caves mistake Kaardral and the Stirge for chosen ones of their ravenous god. Now the sahuagin serve the blood-drinking murderers unquestioningly and haul fresh prey before them.

Dock Workers' Bane: Several of the downtrodden coolies who break their backs on Harbor's docks have gone missing as well, dragged from the piers by sahuagin. They are a clannish bunch, but the workers talk to the PCs if the characters succeed on a DC 20 Diplomacy check.

Clues: A few of the workers relate to the PCs that a hobgoblin slaver ship that docked in Harbor, called the *Winter's Maid*, recently suffered a rash of vampiric attacks on its living cargo. The dock workers also impart to the PCs that the real power on the waterfront is the Bilge Rats, a ruthless gang that feeds their enemies to their dire rat pets, and rule the docks unopposed. One of the dock workers, a half-orc named Droggs, knows a few low-ranking members of the gang and can set up a meet with the party if they like. Droggs has no idea the Bilge Rats are complicit in the sahuagin attacks (see below).

short excursion into Xen'drik. The party might begin a prolonged rivalry with the Emerald Claw thanks to interfering with the Talon, or get mixed up with the Titans again (who are looking for a little payback). The choice is yours (and theirs).

If the PCs are hell-bent on tracking down Kaardral and/or the Stirge, feel free to begin Chapter 2 of this adventure immediately. You can simply assume that the Stirge and Kaardral immediately begin devouring the populace of Stormreach and attract the PCs' attentions.

CHAPTER 2: A FEAST OF BLOOD

Shortly after the PCs tangle with the Talon, the first murmurs of several grisly deaths on the streets of Stormreach start to surface. Stormreach is a city accustomed to violence, but the bizarre nature of these new murders garners particular attention. Half of the killings leave behind withered bloodless husks (victims of the Stirge and his new *Blood Mask*), while the other half are mysterious disappearances where the only trace of wrongdoing left behind is fine-grained sand (Kaardral's predations).

Kaardral longs to reunite with his beloved *Blood Mask*; however, his form remains completely unstable, and the mummy can constitute his bloodless dusty form into humanoid shape for short periods of time only. He cannot use or wear items effectively until he drinks nearly the equivalent of an ocean of blood from his prey. Only then can he restore his body long term and reclaim the mask. The *Blood Mask* suffers from its own voracious hunger as well, and it is using the Stirge as a host through which to hunt for its sanguine nourishment.

Murder investigations in Stormreach are curt and cursory. Unless a case is overly simple, the Stormreach Guard does not bother to investigate the particulars of the crime. So far the victims have been from the lower class or were vagrants with no family or friends to spend coin on private inquisitives to discern the crime's perpetrator.

Fear now grips the city's lower class and the PCs hear whispers of strange "vampire" attacks resulting in exsanguinated corpses, as well as the disappearance of dozens of citizens. Sadly the crime scenes are heavily tainted, or the trail is too cold to investigate in most cases. See the Bloody Murder sidebar for some fun roleplaying encounters that offer the PCs a few clues to these mysterious murders.

ENTREATING WITH RATS

If the PCs take Droggs up on his offer to connect them with the Bilge Rats, he learns through his contacts that one of their higher ranking members agrees to meet the party. The Rats choose a dark patch of mold-ridden Underdocks, where the sun never shines, for a clandestine face-to-face with the PCs. Droggs can lead them there.

When they draw close, read or paraphrase the following:

Darkness holds sway in the Underdocks. The waterfront boardwalks and piers creak above, and brackish water soaks the moldy barnacle-ridden planks underfoot. Entire patches of the Underdocks surrendered long ago to rot and brine, leaving caved-in holes where eddies of foul waste water swirl. In the distance a freighter hulk, cracked in half by a storm's fist and washed under the piers by a heedless tide, lays beached on a patch of muddy sand.

Unfortunately for the PCs, the Rats have no intention of handing over any information. The Bilge Rats' run-in with Kaardral and the Stirge as these two preyed on the indigents of the Harbor almost erupted in violence, but the Rats have always been opportunists. The Rats have long been seated at the apex of the Harbor's crime, but power brings enemies by the score. Constantly clashing with the Shrouds and other rising gangs, the Rats are hard pressed to hold onto their power. When they discovered a dangerous pair of murderers operating in the Harbor, the leader of the Rats, a deadly assassin named Cartha, decided to cut a deal. The Rats pledged to ignore the predations of Kaardral and the Stirge, and in return these two would agree to focus their appetites on other criminals such as the Shrouds.

When Droggs reports that a band of adventurers is seeking information on the murderers, the Bilge Rats plan a deadly ambush to remove this thorn in their new allies' sides. They dispatch an ugly Gifted Rat (equivalent of a capo in their organization) named Skraga and a few of his fellows to the Underdocks to dispatch the troublesome PCs. See the tactical encounter for details on the Rats' attack.

Tactical Encounter: Rats Below the Docks (page 27).

THE WINTER'S MAID

Slavery is an ugly atrocity. Stormreach's official slavery policy is nebulous, but the Storm Lords do nothing to prevent the monthly deliveries of hobgoblin slave vessels hauling victims across the Thunder Sea in horrible conditions. Quartered in cramped 5-foot berths, many of these captives die in transit. Those who survive can only look forward to a life of blood and agony in the Red Ring, or as a plaything for one of the city's crueler elite.

The *Winter's Maid* is a common sight in the Harbor, arriving once a month and selling off its slaves to interested stablemasters or wealthy merchants. Abolitionists commonly demonstrate on the piers around the vessel, but the Blood Council of the Red Ring often lends the hobgoblins some muscle from their gladiator stables if the demonstrations swell toward violence.

When the PCs draw near, read or paraphrase the following:

A black ship, its two masts wrapped in iron chains, sways in the harbor. Her deck is patrolled by burly hobgoblins wearing heavy plates of spike-studded steel and clutching skull-cracking black iron clubs in their meaty hands. The hold is windowless, but the coughs and pitiable moans of captives resound from within it.

The grim hobgoblins who man the vessel are the lowest sort of evil—soulless sellswords who profit from the misery of others. They don't usually allow anyone below deck, but if the PCs mention the murders and succeed on a DC 20 Diplomacy check, the slavers let the PCs aboard to investigate in hopes they can stop the predations on their valuable "cargo."

The PCs may also attempt to bluff their way aboard by pretending to be a stablemaster and his entourage (DC 20). The party may also attempt to sneak aboard the vessel.

When the PCs head below decks, read or paraphrase the following:

The hold stinks of human waste and blood. Unwashed bodies are huddled in tiny berths, and iron bars keep a host of sallow, hollow-eyed captives locked behind them. Old toothless men are jaundiced from scurvy, young women nurse a rainbow of bruises and cower from their hobgoblin tormentors, and children hug themselves in the corners of their cells. Misery is thick in this place. A hobgoblin drools and leers as he patrols between the cells, kicking a young boy who crouches too close to the bars. A human man in red robes stands next to a giant of a man in gold gilded armor, who holds a dire flail almost casually in his thick fists.

SPOILING FOR A FIGHT

Even if the PCs talk their way aboard the *Winter's Maid,* it's likely their trip below decks will end in bloodshed. Do your best to provoke a fight with the party by revealing just how miserably the captives wallowing in their cramped cells are treated by the slavers. The stablemaster below deck is buying slaves, and he has the hobgoblins haul slaves before him to be treated like animals. He pokes and prods them, and then has his bloodbound gladiator kick and beat them to see what kind of punishment they can take. At some point, if your PCs are of good alignment, they are likely to intervene and a fight breaks out. The fun of this encounter is pushing evil in the party's face so they can feel like true heroes when they stand up to this oppression. Also, this encounter with the slavers and stablemaster creates great hooks for future adventures. Messing with the lucrative slave trade provokes retribution both from the hobgoblin slaver organizations and the Blood Council of the Red Ring. This encounter could draw the PCs into the murky politics and brutal battles of Stormreach's arena (see *City of Stormreach* for more details).

Described above are an up-and-coming stablemaster of the Red Ring (a sniveling mage named Telargo) and one of his deadliest gladiators: the mighty Batanga, a Seren barbarian long ago captured by slavers and sold to Telargo. If the PCs talked their way below deck, the hobgoblins lead them to an area of cages holding several shriveled corpses, their blood drained to the last drop. Obviously the work of the *Blood Mask*, these bodies bear the same distinctive wounds as the bodies of Horkato's prostitutes. The ship provides the perfect food supply for the Stirge, who snuck aboard and feasted upon the bound slaves.

If the PCs bluffed their way below deck, they have a problem when Telargo and his bloodbound gladiator catch sight of them. The stablemaster doesn't recognize the PCs and immediately reveals the ruse to the hobgoblins, who respond with violence (see Encounter 6).

If the PCs interview the slavers, two of the hobgoblins caught a glimpse of the Stirge feasting before he fled and can describe the blood-masked cat burglar in detail. Beyond that they can offer little in the way of clues or means to tracking the Stirge down. If the PCs decide to stake out the ship, they are sadly out of luck, since now the *Blood Mask* and Kaardral rely on their sahuagin servants to supply them fresh victims.

Tactical Encounter: Winter's Maid (page 30).

THE BLOOD MASK

This white mask bears strange piercings that extend from its sockets, and razor-sharp hollow-pointed teeth jut from its maw. The spotless white sheen bears no scratches and no discoloration of any kind.

Senses: See in darkness, blindsense 60 ft., telepathy
Languages: Elven, Language of the Shadow Plane, Quor
Abilities: Int 22, Wis 24, Cha 26, Ego 26
Greater powers—heal 1/day, blood drain
Lesser powers—*see in darkness, vampiric touch* (3/day), *invisibility* (3/day), and *hold person* (3/day)
Blood Drain (Su) The Blood Mask allows its bearer to drain the blood of a grappled foe, dealing 1d6 points of Con damage per round the hold is maintained. The wearer heals 5 hit points per point of Con drained and gains temporary hit points over his maximum if he is undamaged. These temporary hit points persist for 1 hour.

INTO THE DEVOURER'S MAW

If the PCs interrogate Skraga, they learn Kaardral and the Stirge are holed up in a complex of sea caves one mile east of Stormreach's harbor. The caves used to be used by smugglers before a band of fierce sahuagin claimed them as a holy site devoted to the Devourer. The PCs can either hire a boat or hoof it overland along the sea cliffs to reach the location. Once there, the entrance to the caves is easy to locate if you know what to look for (a small cove along the cliffs). From here on out, the investigation is over, and the PCs face a bloody contest of will and mettle against a band of man-eating sahuagin, an ancient mummy lord, and an evil artifact whose hunger for blood can never be sated.

Tactical Encounter: Maw of the Devourer (page 32).

Tactical Encounter: Sahuagin Beach (page 35).

LAIR OF THE STIRGE

As PCs leave the sea caves, they enter a cavernous smuggler's den that pirates once used but that now serves as the stomping ground of the Stirge and his *Blood Mask*.

Read them the following:

This dank chamber is crossed by dozens of rotting hempen ropes rigged in elaborate weblike arrays. Hanging from the ceiling, a host of the dead twist in the breeze that blows in

from the tidal chamber. More husks than corpses really, these withered bodies and hollow faces are blanched gray-white as if every ounce of blood has been bled from them. At the center of this large cave is a deep pit delving into impenetrable blackness far below. Rotting boards, no doubt harvested from an armada of derelict ships or the driftwood of those unfortunate enough to be splintered in a storm, span this chasm.

See the tactical encounter for further details.
Tactical Encounter: Stirge's Den (page 38).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Throughout the course of "City of Blood," the PCs have run afoul of two of Stormreach's most dangerous criminal organizations, tangled with hobgoblin slavers, battled a respected stablemaster of the Red Ring, riled the Emerald Claw's proverbial hornet's nest, and crossed paths with sahuagin worshipers of the Devourer. Even if Kaardral and the *Blood Mask* are dealt with and unable to escape, hooks for further adventures in Stormreach abound. Even if the PCs defeat the Stirge, or free him from the mask, there is still the matter of the *Blood Mask*'s destruction. The seductive power of the artifact could likely corrupt a member of the party, and even if it does not, destroying the malignant thing is beyond the PCs immediate power. They may need to undertake a quest to a volcanic crater deep in the Xen'drik interior, or destroy it at the White Ziggurat in Menechtarun. The particulars of this quest may lead the party all over the savage continent and into boundless adventure and peril.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicolas Logue is a 1st-level Unemployed, whose recent credits include numerous adventures and articles in *Dungeon* and *Dragon Magazines*, *Crown of the Kobold King*, *Voyage of the Golden Dragon*, *Eyes of the Lich Queen*, *Monster Manual V*, and *Dragons of Eberron*, as well as the upcoming *Carnival of Tears*, and *Hook Mountain Massacre* (the third installment of the new *Pathfinder Rise of the Runelords* Adventure Path).

Nicolas is also an actor/playwright/fight director and a Full Instructor with Dueling Arts International who has performed, taught and trained in New York, Honolulu, and throughout China. He is a member of the avant garde troupe *Cruel Theatre*, based in Hawai'i and New York.

Marketplace Throwdown

Encounter Level 7

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map wherever they might have been shopping before the fray breaks out. After you read the text below to them, place the titans and the Shroud gang member on the map as well.

- Titans (T)
- Kelembra, Shroud member (S)

When the fight breaks out, read:

The thrumming buzz of the busy market suddenly surges to a new level of cacophony. A thundering roar presages a snarling half-giant, tall as a troll, who stumbles around the corner. He is drenched, his wet hair matted about his face. Several others follow at his heels, snatching up spare wagon wheels, wrenching posts free of the ground, and hefting crates and casks as makeshift weapons. The source of the giants' ire reveals itself: A frail-looking elf, wrapped in dozens of scarves and veils, backs up against a large section of ruined wall. Cornered and winded, the elf has nowhere left to run as the giants close in on her.

7 Titan Thugs (Raging) — CR 3

XPH 200
hp 26 (2 HD)

Male half-giant barbarian 2
CN Medium half-giant (psionic)
Init +0; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +0
Languages Common, Giant

AC 11, touch 10, flat-footed 11; uncanny dodge (+3 armor, –2 rage)
Fort +7, **Ref** +0, **Will** +2; +2.against fire effects

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee unarmed +8 (1d3+6 nonlethal) or Large improvised greatclub +5 (2d8+9)
Ranged thrown cask or crate –2 (2d6+6)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +8
Atk Options powerful build, rage 1/day
Psi-Like Abilities (ML 1st): 1/day—*stomp (DC 10)*

Abilities Str 22, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 10
Feats Weapon Focus (greatclub)
Skills Climb +9, Intimidate +5, Jump +9, Listen +2, Survival +1, Swim +8
Possessions improvised greatclub (wagon axle, stall post, a whole roast pig, and so on), studded leather armor, belt pouch with 10 copper and a handful of gold teeth (3 gp value), rolled-up smutty poster for the Pink Conch pleasure den

Powerful Build (Su) The physical stature of half-giants lets them function in many ways as if they were one size category larger. Whenever a half-giant is subject to a size modifier for an opposed check (such as during a grapple check, bull rush, or trip), the half-giant is treated as one size larger if doing so would be advantageous to him. A half-giant is also considered to be one size larger when determining whether a creature's special attacks based on size (such as swallow whole) can affect him. A half-giant can use weapons designed for a creature one size larger without penalty. However his space and reach remain those of a creature of his actual size. The benefits of this racial trait stack with the effects of powers, abilities, and spells that change the subject's size category.

Rage (Ex) When not in a rage, the titans use the following statistics.
AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13
hp decrease by 4
Fort +5, **Will** +0
Melee unarmed +6 (1d3+4 nonlethal) or Large improvised greatclub +3 (2d8+6)
Ranged thrown cask or crate –2 (2d6+4)
Grp +6
Abilities Str 18, Con 14
Skills Climb +7, Jump +7, Swim +6

Kelembra, Shroud Gang Member — CR 3

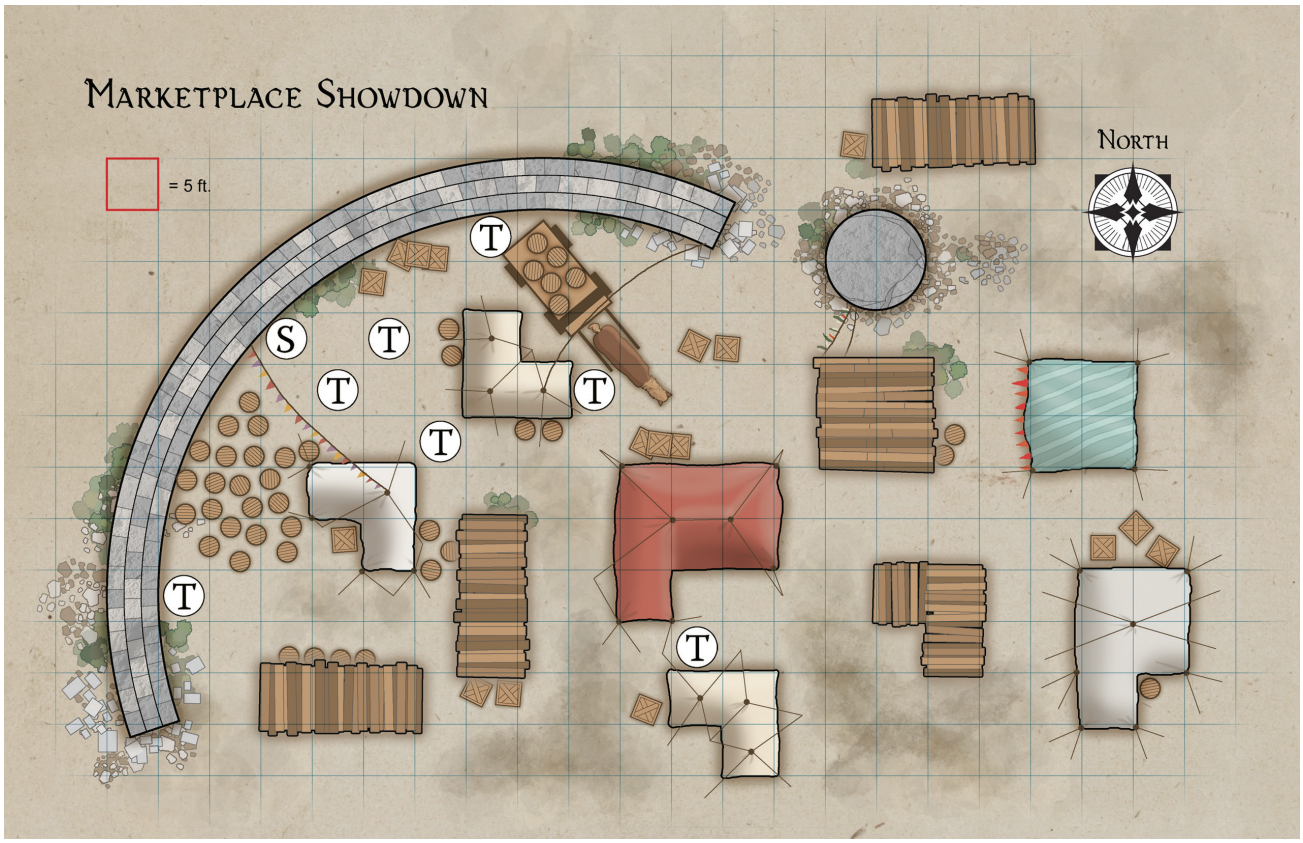
hp 13 (3 HD)

Female elf rogue 3
N Medium humanoid (elf)
Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +3, Spot +3
Languages Common, Elven

AC 20, touch 17, flat-footed 17 (+3 Dex, +3 armor, +2 shield, +1 natural, +2 dodge)
Fort +1, **Ref** +6, **Will** +1; +2 against enchantment effects
Immune sleep

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk dagger +2 (1d4+1)
Ranged mwk dagger +4 (1d4+1)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3
Atk Options sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *potion of expeditious retreat*

Abilities Str 12, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 12



SQ elf qualities
Feats Combat Expertise*, Weapon Finesse
Skills Balance +10, Bluff +7, Climb +1, Escape Artist +8, Gather Info +8, Hide +8, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +3, Move Silently +8, Search +3, Spot +3, Tumble +10
Possessions 4 masterwork daggers, studded leather armor, *+1 buckler*, pouch full of knuckle bone dice (some loaded, some fair), a deck of Dragon's Ante playing placards
*+2 dodge, –2 attack

TACTICS

Kelembra quaffs her *potion of expeditious retreat* and darts about trying to avoid being squashed by the Titans. She allocates her Combat Expertise to her AC (noted above), and when possible fights defensively. If the PCs come to her aid, she pitches in, helping the party out with a sneak attack every chance she gets. The Titans rage immediately and focus their wrath on Kelembra, but soon whirl on the PCs if they interfere. The half-giants hurl casks and crates (see Optional Rules below) and lay about with their makeshift clubs. They are not in this fight for blood, though, and if three of their number are felled, they back off, promising more trouble for the party later as they flee the scene.

OPTIONAL RULES

The Marketplace attracts all sorts of bizarre wares and goods from across the face of Eberron. Each time a Titan hurls a cask or crate, consult the following and either pick the entry that strikes your fancy or roll 1d6 randomly.

1: Crate of Nails: The crate inflicts damage normally against a struck foe as it splinters apart and showers the target with sharp nails, hooks, and other barblike fasteners. Additionally, even if the crate misses its target, the area in a radius of 5 feet around the target is covered in the pointy nails, which act as caltrops for all intents and purposes (*PHB* 126).

2: Cask of Royal Jelly: This thick sticky honey, harvested from giant bee hives in the jungles of Xen'drik, is a mess. A cask of this stuff inflicts damage normally, but then acts as a tanglefoot bag against the target. Additionally, even if the crate misses its target, the 5-foot radius around the target is treated as if it were covered in a *grease* spell.

3: Crate of Red-Back Badgers: This caged crate contains four specimens of a very rare breed of badger native to the Xen'drik interior. The cage shatters over the target's head (inflicting damage normally) and sets these ornery menaces free (*MM* 268).

4: Cask of Stone Salve: This hermetically sealed crate bearing the words "Vatagar's Magics and Wonders" emblazoned on its side inflicts damage normally, but then completely coats the target in *stone salve*, which grants them a *stoneskin* effect for 10 minutes.

5: Crate of Crimson Spice: Good crimson sells for a gold piece an ounce and turns a bland meal into a fiery repast. Of course when it hits a target, it inflicts damage normally and also blinds her for 1 round as the spice invades the eye.

6: Cask of Assassin Vine Sprouts: Some crazed druid stuffed a living assassin vine in this cask for shipment to a patron across the city who collects exotic plants. The cask inflicts damage normally, and as it comes apart the cramped and murderous assassin vine is set free. It then attacks the nearest target.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs succeed in saving Kelembra, she does not forget their assistance. A Shroud always pays her debts and when she reports to the leader of her gang how the PCs saved her from a skull-cracking, they decide to make it right. In Encounter CB6, or any other time the PCs need assistance (such as in tracking down the Stirge in Part 2 of this adventure), the Shrouds come to their aid.

CONCLUSION

Because the Titans are hardly armed and are not ready to face a group of seasoned adventurers, give the party only 75% of the experience they would have earned for defeating the half-giants in this encounter.

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Tents: These canvas tents are propped up by stakes and small wooden posts, and they offer concealment to anyone behind them but not cover. Hardness 1, hp 10, rip DC 12.

Stalls: These sturdier wooden stalls offer cover. Hardness 5, hp 20, smash DC 18.

Mayhem at Midnight

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Place the PCs around the hearth, where they are taking a brandy with Varan Starseeker, then place Belzar and his thugs on the map at their locations.

- Starseeker (S)
- Belzar (B)
- Half-orc thugs (O)
- Half-orc thugs with crossbows (X)

When the Belzar and his thugs enter the room, read:

The doors at the far end of the room are thrown open, and a few hulking half-orcs in long leather trenchcoats enter the room. Their tusks shine in the everbright chandelier light and cruel polished steel saw-bladed short swords glint in their thick hands. At the center of their phalanx is a halfling with a wicked smile on his face and a bandolier of daggers strapped across his chest "Greetings, ladies! If you'll all just remain calm as we help ourselves to a few of these trinkets, there will be absolutely no need for blood."

If the PCs succeed on a DC 20 Spot check, read:

A group of the half-orc thugs move stealthily from display case to display case, fanning out on the east side of the large chamber, each gripping a black crossbow in their hands.

Belzar — CR 7

ELC 79
hp 53 (7 HD)

Male halfling ranger 2/rogue 3/extreme explorer 2
CE Small humanoid
Init +4; **Senses** Listen +8, Spot +6
Languages Common

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 16; Two-Weapon Defense (+1 size, +4 Dex, +5 armor, +1 dodge)
Fort +8, **Ref** +14, **Will** +3 (+5 against fear); improved evasion

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), extreme hustle
Melee *+1 short sword* +9 (1d4+2) and *+1 dagger* +9 (1d3+1)
Ranged mwk dagger +10 (1d3+1) and mwk dagger +10 (1d3) or *wand of scorching ray* +11 (4d6 fire damage)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +2
Atk Options favored enemy human +2, sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *potion of bear's endurance, wand of scorching ray* (21 charges), *wand of shatter* (7 charges)

Abilities Str 12, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 13
SQ additional action point, trap sense +2, trapfinding, wild empathy
Feats Action Boost, Track[B], Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Weapon Finesse
Skills Climb +8, Escape Artist +12, Hide +8, Intimidate +7, Jump +15, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +5, Listen +8, Move Silently +6, Spot +6, Survival +6, Tumble +12, Use Magic Device +8, Use Rope +8
Possessions combat gear plus *+2 studded leather armor, +1 short sword, +1 dagger, boots of striding and springing,* 6 masterwork daggers, oiled black leather trenchcoat (20 gp value), pouch with 30 gp, gold cigarra case (20 gp), Xen'drik spice cigarras (10 gp value)

10 Half-Orc Thugs — CR 1

hp 10 (1 HD)

Male half-orc fighter 1
CE Medium humanoid (half-orc)
Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common, Orc

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor)
Fort +2, **Ref** +0, **Will** –1

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk short sword +6 (1d6+3/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +3 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +4
Combat Gear *potion of shield of faith*

Abilities Str 16, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 8
Feats Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Focus (light crossbow)
Skills Climb +5, Intimidate +3, Jump +5, Listen +0, Spot +0
Possessions combat gear plus masterwork light crossbow, 10 bolts, masterwork short sword, black leather trenchcoat, masterwork studded leather armor, pouch with 3 gp

TACTICS

When the fight breaks out, Belzar leaps up onto the display case behind him and then up onto the chandelier hanging above, laying waste with his *wand of scorching*

ray. The short-sword-wielding thugs push display cases over on the PCs if they can; otherwise they rush forward to engage them. Their crossbow-gripping allies take cover and strafe the party, pushing over display cases on anyone who tries to close the distance. If any PC moves adjacent to a display case, Belzar lets loose with his *wand of shatter*, especially if a PC moves over the large covered sarcophagus. If Belzar shatters the glass floor covering it, anyone above plunges into the sarcophagus with the old crusty mummy there, taking 1d6 points of damage and falling prone. Varan cries out during the whole affair, moaning in agony every time a display case and its contents are smashed to bits.

DEVELOPMENT

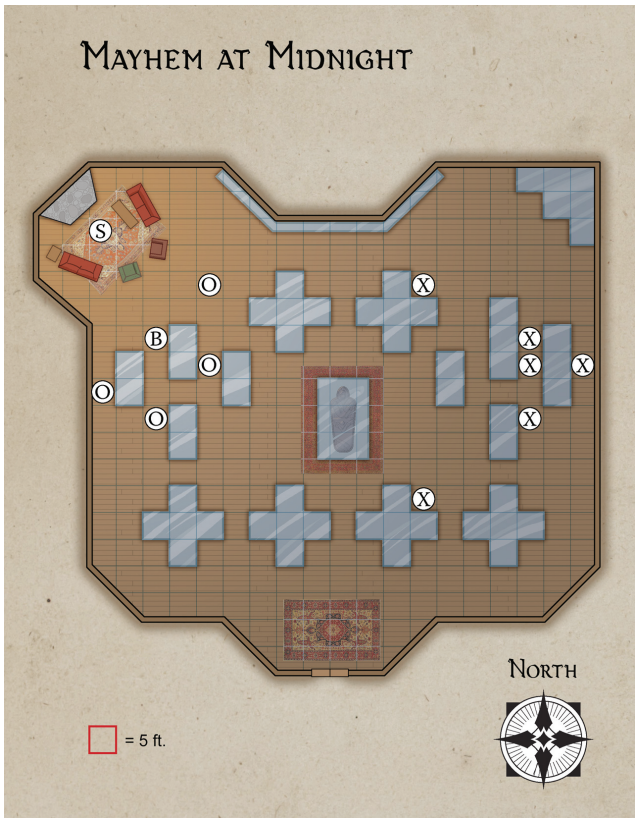
If captured alive, the half-orcs know nothing beyond the fact they were hired by Belzar as muscle to help hit the Starseeker Estate. They are all rejects of House Tharashk whose incompetence during a jungle expedition led to the demise of a dragonmarked heir. They are downtrodden and desperate, but redeemable. If the PCs take any interest in the half-orcs and learn their story with a DC 25 Diplomacy check, they may take actions to set these would-be criminals back on a better path. If the party does so, award them a 1,000 experience point story award for their efforts.

Belzar, if taken alive, can point the PCs to the scarred elf who hired him to hit the estate. The elf goes by the name Talon, and he is the owner and operator of the Broken Link, a bar in Forgelight whose vicious "chain matches" draw a bloodthirsty crowd every night. Belzar is all too happy to reveal his employer's identity on the condition that he and any surviving half-orcs are released from custody. If the PCs refuse, the halfling clams up, and a DC 30 Intimidate check is necessary to get him talking.

CONCLUSION

The number of display cases toppled or shattered in the fray directly affects Starseeker's attitude toward the PCs from here on out. If no display cases are damaged in the battle, Varan becomes helpful. If one to three display cases are demolished, he shifts to friendly. If four or five cases are destroyed, he becomes indifferent, and if six or more are destroyed, he shifts to unfriendly. A DC 30 Diplomacy check reduces this shift by one (grant the PCs a +5 bonus on the check if they put the blame on Belzar and +10 if they mention that without their aid, the thugs might have robbed the whole chateau).

Features of the Room



The room has the following features.

Display Cases: These cases hold everything ancient drow spears, giant death masks, desiccated mummified grimlocks, yuan-ti pottery, and head-dresses. If pushed over, anyone within 10 feet of the side it's pushed toward takes 2d6 points of damage and is pinned (Str 18). The cases offer cover to anyone hiding behind them. For fun, if any of the half-orcs or Belzar are disarmed, have them grab a random weapon from one of these cases. The display cases have these statistics: hardness 3; hp 10; break DC 15; push over DC 15.

In-Floor Sarcophagus: This large stone sarcophagus is built into a floor chamber covered with a glass plate above, which allows visitors to look down upon the mummy resting within. Anyone falling in takes 1d6 points of damage and must make a DC 10 Will save or be shaken for 1d4 rounds when she lands on top of this ancient mummy and stares into its shriveled visage. The glass plate has a hardness of 3, 10 hp, and a break DC of 15.

Mirrored Wall Bar: This bar is well-stocked with potent spirits, and if something strikes it with any fire damage (such as an errant ray from Belzar's wand), it bursts into flame, which causes 1d6 points of fire damage to anyone within 10 feet. The fire begins to spread quickly unless put out and threatens to consume the whole room.

Illumination: The room is lit by a chandelier.

Battle at the Broken Link

Encounter Level Varies

SETUP

If the PCs' investigations garnered notice, Talon knows their faces by description, and he is ready for trouble. He has brought in extra sellswords (mostly off-duty members of the Guard) and seeded them throughout the crowd. If the PCs' investigations were kept secret or if they take action to hide their appearance as they enter, then only eight enforcers are tending the place. Place the PCs wherever they are in the bar when Talon decides to flee. Place Gorgo and the "undercover" enforcers on the map as well. If the PCs avoided the Talon's attention in their investigations, then remove all the enforcers except the eight in the secret side chambers on the map. As soon as Talon ascends to the roof on his rigged chain, he releases a carrion crawler from the caged pit below the tavern.

- Talon (T)
- Enforcers (X)
- Gorgo (O)
- Carrion crawler trap doors (C)
- Patron

If the PCs' investigations gained Talon's notice and when the battle breaks out, read:

The ugly tatter-faced elf leaps to his feet and signals the brutish drooling ogre nearby, who lets out a roar. Suddenly several patrons of the Broken Link set down their mugs of grog, stand, and draw pairs of short swords from underneath their cloaks. A few others suddenly bring up crossbows from underneath their tables. Other patrons wheel away from these murderous thugs as they bear down on you with sneering death written all over their faces.

If the PCs' investigations didn't gain Talon's notice and when the battle breaks out, read:

The ugly tatter-faced elf leaps to his feet and the hulking ogre bouncer nearby flexes his might and turns your way. Concealed panels on the walls slide away to expose leather-clad goons brandishing crossbows.

When Talon unleashes the carrion crawler, read:

A sickening cacophony of slurping and scuttling emerges from behind rusty grates along the floor, and suddenly the grates yank open. A nightmarish wormlike thing with a dozen wriggling tentacles around its pulsating toothy mouth crawls up from below. Its green carapace is slick with slime and its rolling black eyes scan the room before it lurches forward with a squeal.

Talon — CR 7

hp 56 (7 HD)

Male elf rogue 3/fighter 4
CE Medium humanoid (elf)
Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +9, Spot +6
Languages Common, Elven

AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14
(+6 Dex, +4 armor)
Fort +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +4; +2 against enchantment effects, evasion
Immunities sleep

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee *+2 spiked chain* +15/+10 (2d4+4)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *potion of haste*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 10
SQ elf traits, trap sense +1, trapfinding
Feats Combat Expertise[B], Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Improved Disarm[B], Improved Trip[B], Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (spiked chain)
Skills Balance +14, Bluff +5, Climb +8, Escape Artist +11, Gather Information +6, Hide +12, Jump +14, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Search +2, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6, Tumble +14
Possessions combat gear plus *+4 bracers of armor, +2 spiked chain, +4 amulet of health,* black silk vest (20 gp), black silk pants, *slippers of spider climb, ring of feather fall*

8 (or 18) Enforcers — CR 1

hp 7 (1 HD)

Male human rogue 1
N Medium humanoid (human)
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +3, Spot +3

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13
(+2 Dex, +3 armor)
Fort +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk short sword +4 (1d6+4/19–20) and mwk short sword +4 (1d6+4/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +3 (1d8)
Base Atk +0; **Grp** +4

Atk Options sneak attack +1d6
Combat Gear *potion of bull's strength*

Abilities Str 18, Dex 14, Con 12, Int –8 Wis 10, Cha 10
SQ trapfinding
Feats Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (short sword)
Skills Bluff +4, Climb +8, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Jump +7, Listen +3, Move Silently +5, Spot +3
Possessions combat gear plus two masterwork short swords, masterwork light crossbow, 10 bolts, masterwork studded leather armor, pouch with 4 gp

Gorgo, Ogre Bouncer — CR 3

MM 199
hp 29 (4 HD)

N Large giant
Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

AC 16, touch 8, flat-footed 16
(–1 size, –1 Dex, +5 armor, +3 natural)
Fort +6, **Ref** +0, **Will** +1

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk greatclub +9 melee (2d8+7)
Ranged thrown chair –3 (1d8)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +12
Combat Gear *potion of mirror image*

Abilities Str 21, Dex 8, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 7
Feats Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatclub)
Skills Climb +5, Listen +2, Spot +2
Possessions combat gear plus masterwork greatclub, hide armor, sack filled with dead rats (Gorgo's favorite snack), pouch filled with finger bones and 7 gp

Carrion Crawler — CR 4

MM 30
hp 19 (3 HD)

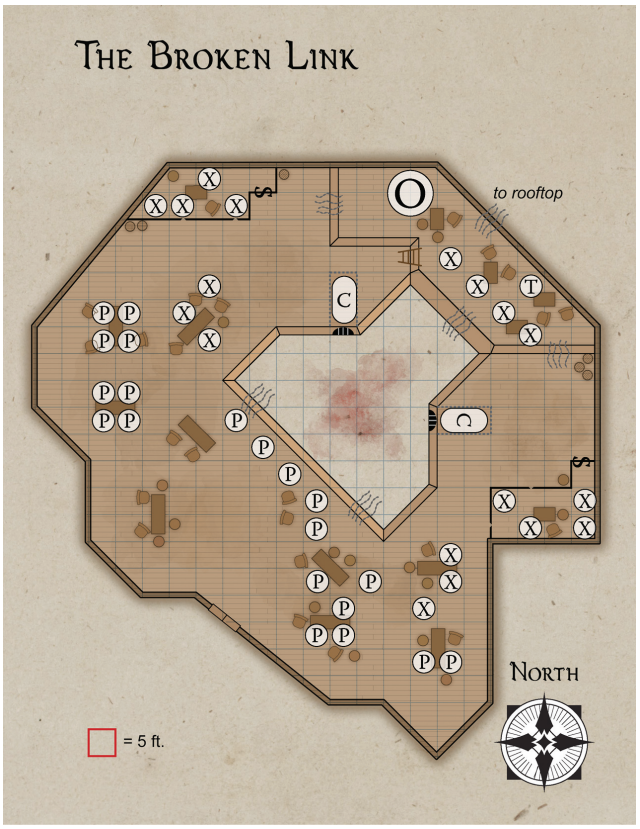
N Large aberration
Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +6, Spot +6

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(–1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural)
Fort +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 15 ft. (3 squares)
Melee 8 tentacles +3 (paralysis) and bite –2 (1d4+1)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +8

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 1, Wis 15, Cha 6
Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Track
Skills Climb +12, Listen +6, Spot +6

Paralysis (Ex) Those hit by a carrion crawler's tentacle attack must succeed on a DC 13 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 2d4 rounds.



TACTICS

Talon has no intention of brawling with adventurers. He sends his goons to deal with the PCs and flees by yanking a rigged chain among the climbing chains on the raised level, which catapults him through a hole in the roof. He does send them a parting gift—the chain he uses to get away also opens both grates to the carrion crawler's den below the floor (although the crawler only emerges from one side). The ogre does his best to keep PCs from following. The enforcers loose crossbow bolts at range, or they close and flank to deliver sneak attacks with their short swords. The carrion crawler goes berserk when unleashed, feeding on patrons unless the PCs attract its attention.

DEVELOPMENT

Talon flees across the crumbling rooftops above. If the PCs chase, procede to the next two encounters. If they neutralize Talon here, skip those encounters.

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Climbing Chains: These chains are used to ascend to the raised level (or to the roof in the case of the chains on that level): hardness 5, hp 15, break DC 20.

Illumination: The room has light from sconces.

Rooftop Chase

Encounter Level Varies

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map as they ascend to the roof, and place Talon on the roof as well, 30 feet farther along his rooftop path for every round after the first 2 it takes the PCs to give chase (he quaffs a potion during those first 2 rounds, and this is already figured into his stats). Don't place the fire elemental, chokers, or mimic on the map until the PCs encounter them.

- Talon (T)
- Large fire elemental (F)
- Choker (C)
- Mimic (M)

When the PCs ascend to the roof of the Broken Link, read:

Wind tears across the cracked rooftop. A heavy chain is moored to an iron ring in the roof, and then it descends to a lower building's rooftop below. In the distance, that same ugly elf nimbly leaps over rubble and sprints across the windswept shingles.

When Talon reaches the location of the fire elemental on the map, read:

The elf somersaults onto the top of a reservoir tower nearby and then wheels to check his back. When he spots you, a snarl breaks across his scarred face and he reaches into his beltpouch. The elf draws forth a sparkling ruby and his snarl turns to an evil grin. He hurls the gem upon the tower's top, and smoke and flames erupt into the air. The fire takes an unnatural, yet almost humanoid shape—two hollow spirals, like eyes, burrow into its "face" as it turns to regard you. "Destroy!" orders the elf as he points a crooked finger in your direction.

When the chokers spring their attack, read:

Suddenly a nearby pile of rubble shudders and a few stones fall loose. A gray blur snaps out toward you faster than your eye can follow. As it closes, you realize it is a sinewy tentacle with three misshapen digits at its end.

When the mimic springs its attack, read:

The stone archway below you lurches suddenly and rises up, a bristling maw of rocky teeth cracking open on its surface.

TALON — CR 7

hp 56 (7 HD)

Male elf rogue 3/fighter 4
CE Medium humanoid (elf)
Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +9, Spot +6
Languages Common, Elven

AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14
(+6 Dex, +4 armor)
Fort +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +4; +2 against enchantment effects, evasion
Immunities sleep

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee *+2 spiked chain* +15/+10 (2d4+4)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *potion of haste*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 10
SQ elf traits, trap sense +1, trapfinding
Feats Combat Expertise[B], Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Improved Disarm[B], Improved Trip[B], Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (spiked chain)
Skills Balance +14, Bluff +5, Climb +8, Escape Artist +11, Gather Information +6, Hide +12, Jump +14, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Search +2, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6, Tumble +14
Possessions combat gear plus *+4 bracers of armor, +2 spiked chain, +4 amulet of health,* black silk vest with a pair of red ravens embroidered on the breast (20 gp), black silk pants, *slippers of spider climb, ring of feather fall*

LARGE FIRE ELEMENTAL — CR 5

MM 98
hp 60 (8 HD); **DR** 5/—

N Large elemental (fire, extraplanar)
Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +6
Languages Ignan

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 13; Dodge, Mobility
(–1 size, +5 Dex, +4 natural)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +5, **Ref** +11, **Will** +2
Weakness cold

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares); Spring Attack

Melee 2 slams +10 (2d6+2 plus 2d6 fire)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +12
Atk Options burn

Abilities Str 14, Dex 21, Con 16, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 11
Feats Dodge, Improved Initiative[B], Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse[B]
Skills Listen +5, Spot +6

Burn (Ex) A fire elemental's slam attack deals bludgeoning damage plus fire damage from the elemental's flaming body. Those hit by the elemental's slam attack must therefore succeed on a DC 17 Reflex save or catch fire. The flames burn for 1d4 rounds. A burning target may spend a move action to extinguish the flames. Any creature attacking the elemental with a natural weapon or unarmed attack is also subject to burn.

3 Chokers — CR 2

MM 34
hp 16 (3 HD)

CE Small aberration
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +1
Languages Undercommon

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15
(+1 size, +2 Dex, +4 natural)
Fort +2, **Ref** +5, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), climb 10 ft. (2 squares); quickness
Melee 2 tentacles +6 melee (1d3+3)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +5
Atk Options constrict, improved grab

Abilities Str 16, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 7
Feats Improved Initiative[B], Lightning Reflexes, Stealthy
Skills Climb +13, Hide +10, Move Silently +6

Constrict (Ex) A choker deals 1d3+3 points of damage with a successful grapple check against a Large or smaller creature. Because it seizes its victim by the neck, a creature in the choker's grasp cannot speak or cast spells with verbal components.
Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a choker must hit a Large or smaller opponent with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict. Chokers receive a +4 racial bonus on grapple checks (already included above).
Quickness (Su) Although not particularly dexterous, a choker is supernaturally quick. It can take an extra standard action or move action during its turn each round.

Mimic — CR 4

MM 186
hp 52 (7 HD)

N Large aberration (shapechanger)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +8
Languages Common

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15
(–1 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural)
Immune acid
Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +6

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares)
Melee 2 slams +9 (1d8+4)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +13
Atk Options adhesive, crush

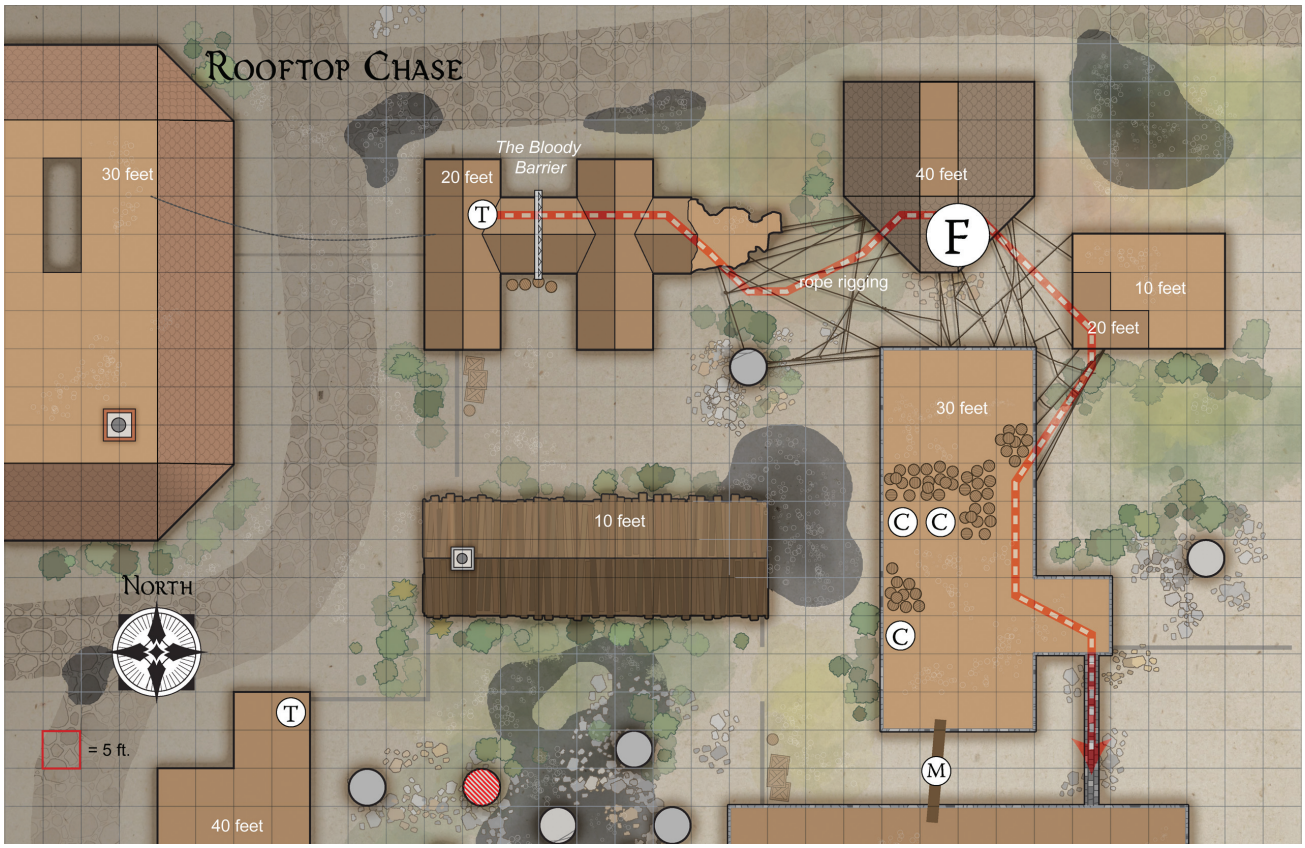
Abilities Str 19, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 10
SQ mimic shape
Feats Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Climb +9, Disguise +13, Listen +8, Spot +8

Adhesive (Ex) A mimic exudes a thick slime that acts as a powerful adhesive. A mimic automatically grapples any creature it hits with its slam attack. Opponents so grappled cannot get free while the mimic is alive without removing the adhesive first. A weapon that strikes a mimic is stuck fast unless the wielder succeeds on a DC 16 Reflex save. A successful DC 16 Strength check is needed to pry it off. Strong alcohol dissolves the adhesive, but the mimic can still grapple normally. A mimic can dissolve its adhesive at will and the substance breaks down 5 rounds after the creature dies.
Crush (Ex) A mimic deals 1d8+4 points of damage with a successful grapple check.
Mimic Shape (Ex) A mimic can assume the general shape of any object that fills roughly 150 cubic feet (in this case a stone archway). The creature cannot substantially alter its size, though. A mimic's body is hard and has a rough texture, no matter what appearance it might present. Anyone who examines the mimic can detect the ruse with a successful Spot check opposed by the mimic's Disguise check.

TACTICS

Talon is on the run. As soon as he ascends to the roof of the Broken Link, he downs his *potion of haste*. Then he bolts, sliding down the chain to the lower rooftop across the way and jumping the Bloody Barrier.

The fire elemental waits for PCs to try traverse the rotten rigging hanging between its tower and the adjacent buildings and then lashes out at them. If they are too far away for its reach, it instead lights the rigging ropes aflame. They snap the following round on



the elemental's turn and anyone still clinging to them plunges to the alleyways below (a fall of 30 feet).

The chokers are riled up by someone racing across their territory. They know better than to attack Talon (they've tangled with the elf before—there were once five of these critters), but they do lash out at the PCs. As soon as one of their numbers falls, they flee for their lives.

The mimic waits until someone steps on it and then grapples them. It hasn't had a substantial meal in a few days. Once it slays a PC, it sets to devouring her and does not pursue anyone else.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs catch up to Talon and neutralize him, then ignore the next encounter (Pillar Battle).

CONCLUSION

If the PCs can bypass any of the creatures in this encounter in order to give chase, award them full experience points as if they defeated the creatures. The goal here is to catch Talon, not tangle with beasties. If they avoid the elemental, chokers, or mimic, all the better for them.

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Strong Wind: The strong wind up here causes a –2 to ranged attack rolls, and Tiny or smaller creatures are knocked down (DC 10 Fortitude save negates).

Bloody Barrier: This low wall on the roof is covered in jagged bits of broken glass, barbed wire, and nails. Traversing the barrier requires a DC 15 Jump check. Otherwise a section of the crumbling wall can be smashed down (hardness 3, hp 10, break DC 15).

Rigging Ropes: These half-rotten ropes can be traversed at full speed with a DC 20 Balance check, or at half speed with a DC 10 Climb check. The ropes are weak (hardness 2, hp 5, snap DC 10).

Pillar Battle

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map when they arrive here. When Talon arrives at the nest across the pillar tops, he waits for them to come.

- Talon (T)
- Wyvern (W)

When Talon reaches the other side, read:

The wind off the water increases, dark clouds roll in from the harbor, and the first drops of rain begin to fall. The black leather-clad elf leaps across the pillar tops gracefully. He lands atop the roof of an abandoned tenement, where a huge pile of twisted metal form a thick nest. The elf turns to face you, throwing his cloak off his back and pulling forth a vicious spiked chain. As he swings the chain, it glints dully in the light.

As the PCs begin to traverse the pillar tops, read:

A hideous shriek rises above the storm's din. From within the twisted nest of steel cable and blackened iron bits rises a black- and purple-scaled draconic horror. The monstrosity's maw is filled with a thousand needle-teeth, and its dark feral eyes lock on to you. The thing's long reptilian body sprouts a whipcord tail mounted with a spikelike stinger.

Talon — CR 7

hp 56 (7 HD)

Male elf rogue 3/fighter 4
CE Medium humanoid (elf)
Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +9, Spot +6
Languages Common, Elven

AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14
(+6 Dex, +4 armor)
Fort +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +4; +2 against enchantment effects, evasion
Immunities sleep

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee *+2 spiked chain* +15/+10 (2d4+4)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, sneak attack +2d6

Abilities Str 14, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 10
SQ elf traits, trapfinding, trap sense +1
Feats Combat Expertise[B], Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Improved Disarm[B], Improved Trip[B], Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (spiked chain)
Skills Balance +14, Bluff +5, Climb +8, Escape Artist +11, Gather Information +6, Hide +12, Jump +14, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Search +2, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6, Tumble +14
Possessions *+4 bracers of armor, +2 spiked chain, +4 amulet of health,* black silk vest with a pair of red ravens embroidered on the breast (20 gp), black silk pants, *slippers of spider climb, ring of feather fall*

Wyvern — CR 6

hp 59 (7 HD)

N Large dragon
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Listen +13, Spot +16
Languages Common

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 17
(–1 size, +1 Dex, +8 natural)
Immune sleep, paralysis
Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6

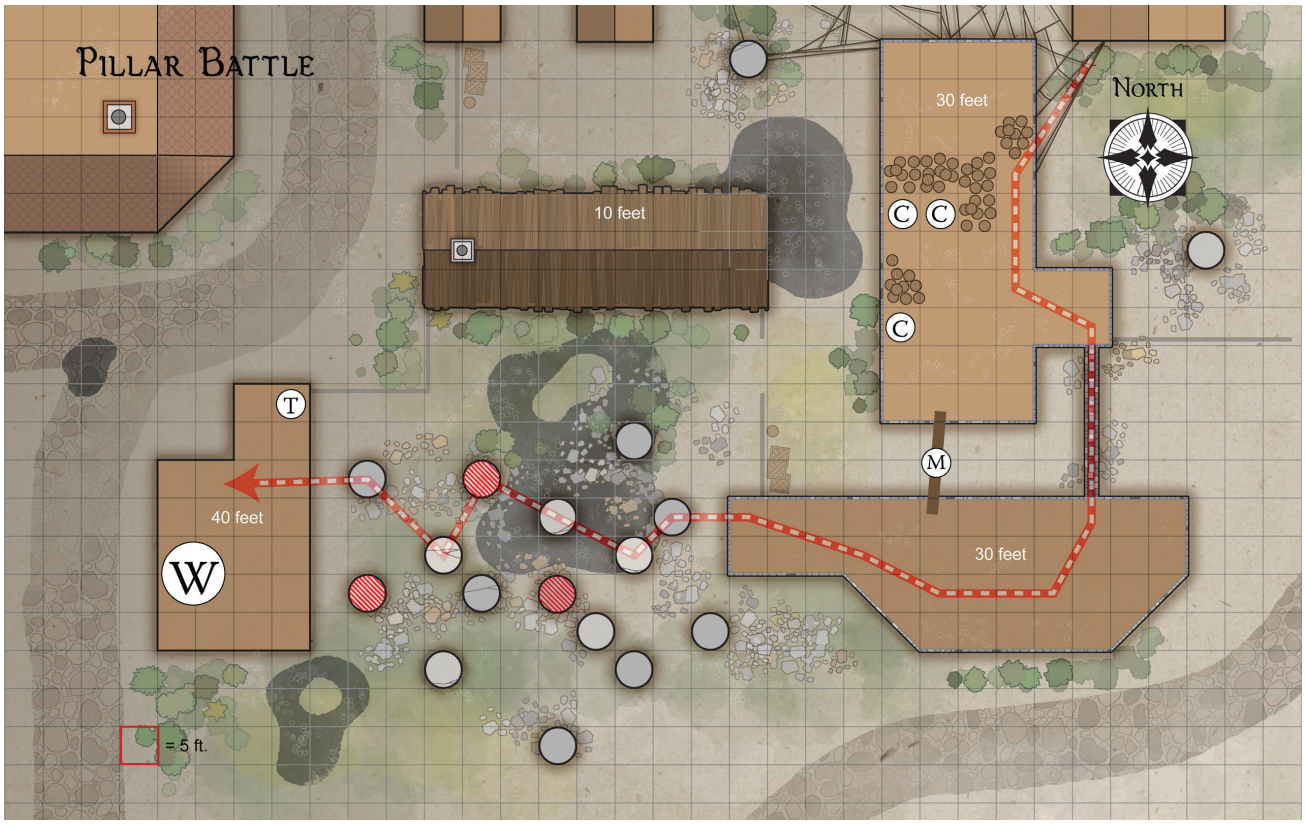
Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 60 ft. (poor); Flyby Attack
Melee sting +10 (1d6+4 plus poison) and
bite +8 (2d8+4) and
2 wings +8 (1d8+2) and
2 talons +8 (2d6+4)
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +15
Atk Options improved grab, poison

Abilities Str 19, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 9
Feats Ability Focus (poison), Alertness, Flyby Attack, Multiattack[B]
Skills Hide +7, Listen +13, Move Silently +11, Spot +16

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the wyvern must hit with its talons. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and stings.
Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 17, initial and secondary damage 2d6 Con.

TACTICS

Talon is fearless and more than willing to die to protect his superiors. He leaps onto the pillar tops to meet any PCs halfway. If a PC is balancing on a ruined pillar, he attacks the pillar top at her feet instead (see Features of the Area), which causes it to crumble away beneath her. If Talon is knocked off a pillar, his *ring of feather fall* kicks



in immediately, and he quickly climbs another pillar. The wyvern moves to defend its master by making liberal use of Flyby Attack. The wyvern fights until slain.

CONCLUSION

Talon tries to avoid being taken alive. If reduced to 10 or fewer hit points, he hurls himself off the rooftops and pastes himself on the cobblestones below. If captured alive, Talon refuses to talk unless subjected to magic or a DC 35 Intimidate check. If the PCs get Talon to talk, he tells them only that he works for a man called the White Raven who was particularly interested in acquiring an artifact called the *Blood Mask* from Varan's Estate. He explains his plan (detailed above) and informs the PCs that his agent, the Stirge, never brought him the mask. He has been hunting the traitor ever since.

If asked about his connections with the Emerald Claw, the Talon touts his membership proudly and snarls "Vol's blood will drown all of Khorvaire!" If the PCs wish to pursue action against the Emerald Claw, the Talon is a perfect in. He can describe the White Raven and arrange a meeting. This falls outside of the purview of this adventure, however. (See *City of Stormreach* for more details on the White Raven and the Emerald Claw's activities in the city.) The PCs might assume the Stirge kept it from them to save the world from whatever horrible plan the Emerald Claw was going to hatch with the artifact. The PCs would be wrong—as they soon learn.

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Severe Wind: The wind here causes a –4 penalty on ranged attack rolls. Also, Tiny or smaller creatures are blown away, Small creatures are knocked down, and Medium creatures are checked (DC 15 Fortitude save negates).

Rain: Rain causes visibility to be halved, causes a –4 penalty on Spot and Listen checks, and causes an additional –4 penalty on ranged attack rolls (for a total of –8 when combined with the severe wind).

Pillars: The wind and rain make keeping footing on these pillars difficult (requiring a DC 10 Balance check).

Ruined Pillars: These pillars are in bad condition and ready to slough away. A successful DC 20 Spot or Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check identifies these hazards. Any attack inflicting 5 or more points of damage causes the top to crumble to the cobblestones below. Anyone standing on it must immediately make a successful DC 15 Reflex save to either Jump (DC 15) to another pillar or grab on to the sturdier portion of the pillar they are on. A successful DC 15 Climb check is necessary to pull herself up.

Rats Below the Docks

Encounter Level 10

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map as they approach the derelict freighter. If the PCs detect the Bilge Rats (opposed Spot against Hide checks) then place them on the map. Otherwise wait until the Rats spring their trap before placing them.

- Skraga (S)
- Bilge Rats (W)

If the PCs do not detect the Bilge Rats, read:

The murky black of the Underdocks looms all around, but ahead the few shafts of moonlight slipping between the rotting dock planks above reveal a broken ship. Once a proud freighter, the ship is now a shattered hull that rots like a carcass forgotten beneath the bustling dock workers above it.

When the Bilge Rats attack, read:

The hideous face of a giant rat emerges from the shadows, its whiskers drooping from either side of its feral snout. Well-gnawed ears, the black eyes of vermin, and sickly yellowed teeth loom at you. The hunched rat thing, which is in vaguely human guise, lunges forward with a steel rapier, and the shadows all around you come alive with movement. Somewhere a hissing whisper cuts through the night, saying, "You tressssspasss in the dark, you pay the pricccce."

Skraga, Hybrid Form — CR 7

MM 175
hp 40 (7 HD); **DR** 5/silver

Male human (wererat) rogue 6
CE Medium humanoid (augmented, shapechanger)
Init +7; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +14, Spot +14
Languages Common

AC 20, touch 17, flat-footed 13; Dodge, uncanny dodge (+6 Dex, +3 natural)
Fort +7, **Ref** +14, **Will** +7; evasion

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft.
Melee +2 *silver rapier* +13 (1d6+4/18–20) and bite +6 (1d4+2)
Ranged mwk dagger +12 (1d4+2/19–20)
Base Atk +4; **Grp** +6
Combat Gear *ring of the ram* (18 charges)
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, sneak attack +3d6

Abilities Str 15, Dex 24, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 13
SQ alternate form, trap sense +2, trapfinding
Feats Alertness, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Iron Will[B], Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Weapon Finesse[B]
Skills Balance +12, Bluff +10, Climb +21, Control Shape +7, Disguise +10 (+12 acting), Escape Artist +16, Gather Information +10, Hide +16, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7, Listen +14, Move Silently +16, Sense Motive +10, Spot +14, Swim +10, Use Magic Device +10
Possessions combat gear plus +2 *keen silver rapier,* necklace of human ears, pouch with 20 gp, human thigh bone scrimshaw pipe, pouch of Xen'drik marshweed (30 gp), 5 tindertwigs**Alternate Form (Su)** Skraga can assume any one of three forms (human, hybrid, dire rat). Changing form is a move equivalent action.

Disease (Ex) Filth fever; bite, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution based.
Rat Empathy (Ex) Communicate with rats and dire rats, and +4 racial bonus on Charisma-based checks against rats and dire rats.
Skills A wererat adds its Dex bonus to Climb checks instead of its Str bonus, and may also take 10 on all Climb checks even when conditions would not allow. Wererats also gain a +8 racial bonus on all Climb and Swim checks.

In human form, Skraga has the following statistics:

Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +14, Spot +14
AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17; Dodge, uncanny dodge (+4 Dex, +5 armor, +2 natural)
Fort +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +7; evasion
Melee +2 *silver rapier* +10 (1d6+4/18–20)
Combat Gear *ring of the ram* (18 charges)
Abilities Str 15, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 13
Skills Escape Artist +13, Hide +13, Move Silently +13
Possessions combat gear plus +2 *keen silver rapier,* +2 *studded leather armor,* necklace of human ears, pouch with 20 gp, human thigh bone scrimshaw pipe, pouch of Xen'drik marshweed (30 gp), 5 tindertwigs

In rat form, Skraga has the following statistics:

Melee bite +11 (1d4+2)

5 Bilge Rats, Hybrid Form **CR 5**

MM 175

hp 29 (5 HD); **DR** 5/silver

Male human (wererat) rogue 4

CE Medium humanoid (augmented, shapechanger)

Init +5; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +9, Spot +9

Languages Common

AC 18, touch 15, flat-footed 13; Two-Weapon Defense, uncanny dodge
(+5 Dex, +2 natural)

Fort +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +5; evasion

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +8 (1d6+1/18–20) and
mwk dagger +8 (1d4/19–20) and
bite +1 (1d4+1)

Ranged mwk dagger +7 (1d4+1/19–20)
mwk dagger +7 (1d4/19–20)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4

Atk Options sneak attack +2d6

Abilities Str 13, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10

SQ alternate form, trap sense +1, trapfinding

Feats Alertness, Iron Will[B], Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse[B], Weapon Focus (rapier)

Skills Appraise +3, Balance +13, Bluff +3, Climb +20, Control Shape +6, Disguise +6, Escape Artist +12, Gather Information +5, Hide +14, Intimidate +6, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +12, Sense Motive +4, Spot +9, Swim +9

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork rapier, 4 masterwork daggers

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Alternate Form (Su) A wererat can assume any one of three forms (human, hybrid, dire rat). Changing form is a move equivalent action.

Disease (Ex) Filth fever; bite, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution based.

Rat Empathy (Ex) Communicate with rats and dire rats, and +4 racial bonus on Charisma-based checks against rats and dire rats.

Skills A wererat adds its Dex bonus to Climb checks instead of its Str bonus, and may also take 10 on all Climb checks even when conditions would not allow. Wererats also gain a +8 racial bonus on all Climb and Swim checks.

In human form, the Bilge Rats have the following statistics:

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +9, Spot +9

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Dodge, uncanny dodge (+2 Dex, +3 armor, +2 natural)

Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +5; evasion

Melee mwk rapier +5 (1d6+1/18–20) and
mwk dagger +5 (1d4/19–20) and

Ranged mwk dagger +4 (1d4+1/19–20)
mwk dagger +4 (1d4/19–20)

Abilities Str 13, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10

Skills Escape Artist +9, Hide +11, Move Silently +9

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork rapier, 4 masterwork daggers, studded leather armor

In rat form, the Bilge Rats have the following statistics:

Melee bite +8 (1d4+1)

TACTICS

The wererats ambush the PCs, making good use of sneak attacks and flanking thereafter. Skraga unleashes blasts from his *ring of the ram*, knocking PCs into the fetid water of the Underdocks, or sending them crashing into the fungus-ridden piles of rotted crates. He then joins the fray, flanking if able or using Improved Feint if not.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs take Skraga alive, he bitterly refuses to talk and demands to be turned over to the Guard that he "might pay for my crimes." In truth, he knows the Bilge Rats' Circle of Plague can easily buy him out of trouble. Magical coercion or a successful DC 30 Intimidate check forces Skraga to talk, since he is far more terrified of what the Circle does to traitors than he is of any punishment the PCs might dole out. If the PCs can't get him to open up, their newfound allies in the Shrouds offer to torture him horribly. Skraga eventually tells the PCs that the murderers are hiding in the sea caves a mile east of Stormreach, where a group sahuagin reside. Skraga purports "dem sharkies been conducting all manner of blood rituals to their Eater God day and night."

CONCLUSION

The hold of the old freighter is where Skraga keeps his personal stash of treasure and goods, including a sack of 150 gp, a large leather parcel of Xen'drik marshweed (400 gp value), a ruby-eyed jade statue of an eagle (600 gp), and a *ring of x-ray vision*.

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

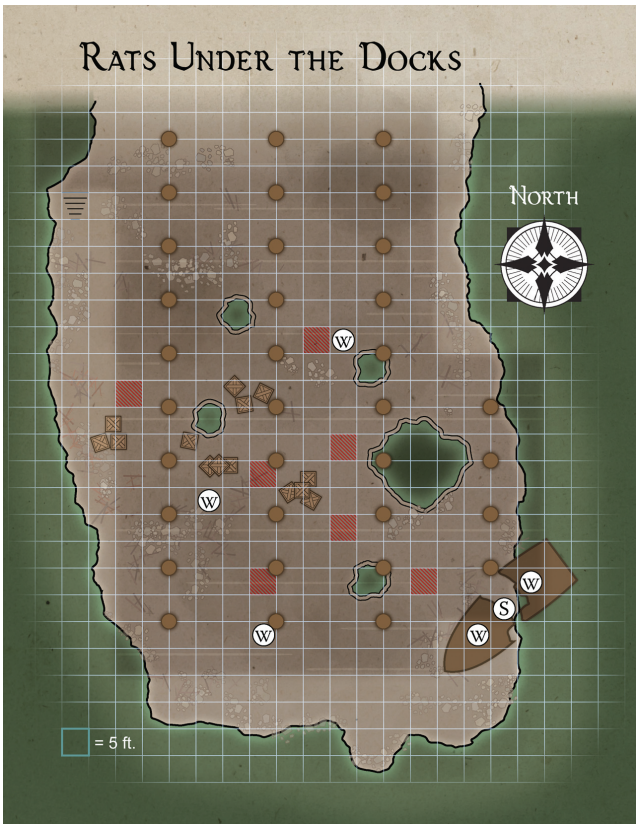
Fetid Water: These areas are where the moldy sun-starved planks of the Underdocks long ago surrendered. Anyone knocked into the disgusting scum-layered brine here takes a –4 penalty on all checks to Swim or Climb out since the thick viscous slime makes navigating these waters difficult.

Rotten Planks: These planks give way under the slightest weight, and anyone stepping on them plunges into fetid water below unless they succeed on a DC 20 Reflex save. A DC 20 Spot check discerns these hazards. The wererats are all well aware of them.

Pillars: These pillars offer cover to anyone hiding behind them.

Fungus-Ridden Crates: These crates are the moldy breeding ground of a dangerous paralytic fungus. Anyone who touches them or is slammed into them (by Skraga's *ring of the ram,* for example) provokes the release of spores. Anyone adjacent to the crates at the time of the release must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or take 2d6 points of Dexterity damage.

Illumination: The area has shadowy illumination from gaps in the planks.



Winter's Maid

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map wherever they were when hostilities erupt on the *Winter's Maid*.

- Hobgoblin slavers (H)
- Batanga, Bloodsworn Gladiator (G)
- Telargo (T)
- Slaves (S)
- Dead Slave (X)

When the fight breaks out, read:

The slavers bang their clubs against their wooden shields and roar as they close for battle. The towering steel-clad gladiator whirls his dire flail menacingly while his balding old stablemaster cowers behind him.

Hobgoblin Slavers — CR 1

MM 153
hp 10 (1 HD)

Male hobgoblin ranger 1
LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +1
Languages Goblin

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15; 20% miss chance (*blur*)
(+4 Dex, +3 armor, +2 shield)
Fort +4, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk club +5 (1d6+2)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3
Atk Options favored enemy humans +2
Combat Gear *potions of blur*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 13
SQ wild empathy +2
Feats Track[B], Weapon Focus (club)
Skills Climb +4, Handle Animal +2, Heal +2, Hide +5, Jump +3, Knowledge (geography) +1, Knowledge (nature) +1, Listen +4, Move Silently +8, Profession (sailor) +2, Profession (slaver) +3, Survival +3, Swim +3, Use Rope +4
Possessions combat gear plus masterwork club, heavy wooden shield, masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork manacles, ring of keys for cages

Batanga, Bloodsworn Gladiator — CR 5

hp 54 (5 HD)

Male human barbarian 1/fighter 4
LN Medium humanoid (human)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +0
Languages Common

AC 18, touch 9, flat-footed 17
(+1 Dex, +9 armor, –2 rage)
Fort +10, **Ref** +2, **Will** +5

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee +*1 dire flail* +13 (1d8+8)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +10
Atk Options rage 1/day (7 rounds)

Abilities Str 20, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 14
SQ fast movement, illiteracy
Feats Exotic Weapon Proficiency (dire flail)[B], Greater Weapon Focus (dire flail)[B], Iron Will, Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Weapon Focus (dire flail), Weapon Specialization (dire flail)[B]
Skills Climb +5, Intimidate +8, Jump +0, Listen +4, Spot +0, Survival +3
Possessions +*1 dire flail, +1 full plate armor*

Rage (Ex) When not in a rage, Batanga uses the following statistics.
AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19
(+1 Dex, +9 armor)
hp decrease by 10
Fort +8, **Will** +3
Melee +*1 dire flail* +11 (1d8+6)
Grp +6
Abilities Str 16, Con 15
Skills Climb +3, Jump –2

Telargo — CR 6

hp 22 (6 HD)

Male human wizard 6
LN Medium humanoid (human)
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1
Languages Common, Elven, Giant, Goblin

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10
(+2 Dex)
Fort +3, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee +*2 dagger* +7 (1d4+1)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +2
Atk Options Empower Spell
Combat Gear scroll of *teleport, wand of charm person* (12 charges)
Spells Prepared (CL 6th):
3rd—*deep slumber* (DC 18), *heroism, hold person* (DC 18)

2nd—*bull's strength, daze monster* (DC 17), *mirror image, Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 17)
1st—*charm person* (DC 16), *mage armor, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement* (+5 ranged touch)
0—*arcane mark* (3), *read magic*

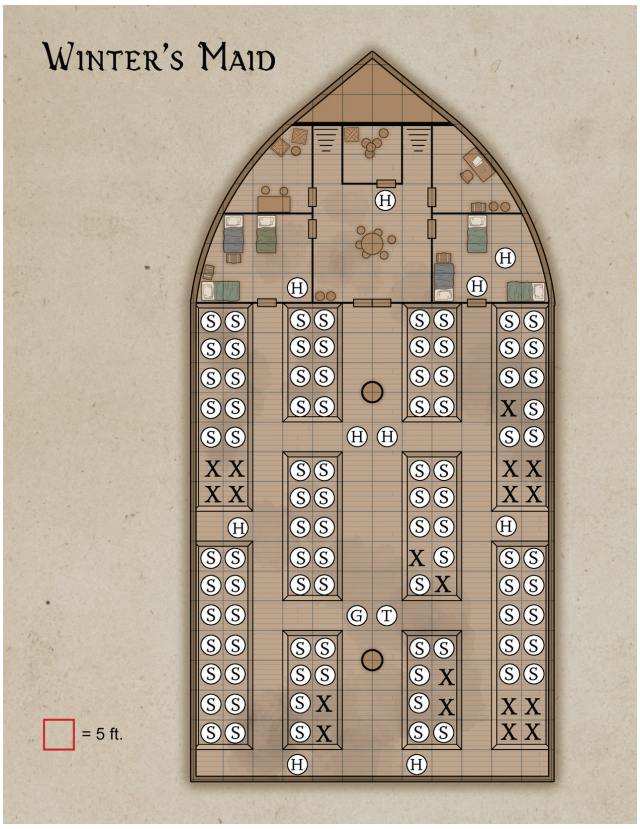
Abilities Str 8, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 15
Feats Empower Spell[B], Greater Spell Focus (enchantment), Scribe Scroll[B], Spell Focus (enchantment), Weapon Finesse
Skills Concentration +10, Decipher Script +12, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (local) +12, Listen +1, Profession (stablemaster) +10, Spellcraft +14, Spot +1
Possessions combat gear plus *+2 dagger*, purple robes, black leather boots, 8 gold and silver rings (20 gp each), jade and silver necklace in the shape of an owl (120 gp)

TACTICS

The hobgoblin slavers rush into melee with the PCs. Telargo panics when the fight breaks out, and first casts *mirror image* and *mage armor* (not included above) on himself. Then he allows the hobgoblins to distract the PCs while he casts *bull's strength* and *heroism* on Batanga (not included above) if he has time. In combat he casts his potent enchantment spells first before resorting to *magic missile* or *ray of enfeeblement*. If Batanga is felled, the stablemaster hurriedly reads his scroll of *teleport* in hopes of escaping. Batanga lays waste with his dire flail. The gladiator is no stranger to brutal combat and fights to the death. The slaves remain caged up, but use aid another actions on adjacent PCs to help them fight the evil taskmasters.

CONCLUSION

Award the PCs an extra 1,000 experience points as a story award if they free the slaves held hostage here, and increase this to 2,000 XP if they take an active interest in helping the shanghaied humans and elves find their way back to their homes in Khorvaire.



Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Rolling Tide: The ship sways in the stormy tide even moored at the docks. Every round, anyone failing a DC 10 Balance or Profession (sailor) check takes a –2 on all attacks and saves that turn.

Illumination: The area has shadowy illumination.

Maw of the Devourer

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Place the PCs on the edge of the map and place the five visible sahuagin there as well. Do not place the other sahuagin and the mutant unless they are spotted (the underwater sahuagin have a +8 circumstance bonus on Hide because they lurk 30 feet below the surface in the dark water, making their total bonus to Hide +14).

- Kharragak, Sahuagin Mutant (M)
- Sahuagin (S)

When the PCs enter the shrine, read:

Eerie blue-green light shimmers through this chamber from light sources located in the deep pools of water throughout. Beyond a long pool, a cluster of three scaled humanoids with huge sharklike maws stand at the ready, tridents held in hand. On a raised dais rests the body of a giant squid, and its tentacles stretch out limply on the stone floor. Two more of these scaly trident-wielding menaces lurk by the squid, watching you with hate in their sunken black eyes. Along the walls, the carcasses of large sharks are mounted like statues.

If the PCs fail to spot the sahuagin and the mutant underwater, the foes ambush the party as they traverse the long pool at the chamber's center.

When they burst from the water to attack, read:

Geysers of frothy sea water erupt around you, and a towering, muscular, shark-mawed, scaly humanoid bursts from the water. An extra pair of arms flex freakishly from its lower torso. It clutches a trident in one massive clawlike hand, and grips sharp picks made of razor coral in the other three. Water cascades from its hideous alien face as it snarls and attacks.

Kharragak, Sahuagin Mutant — CR 6

hp 70 (6 HD)

Male sahuagin (mutant) barbarian 4
CE Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic)
Init +2; **Senses** blindsense 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +7 (+11 underwater), Spot +7 (+11 underwater)
Languages Sahuagin

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; improved uncanny dodge
(+2 Dex, +5 natural, –2 frenzy)
Fort +10, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7
Weakness freshwater sensitivity, light blindness, water dependent

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee *+1 trident* +13/+8 (1d8+10) and 3 mwk coral picks +13 (1d4+4)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +15
Atk Options blood frenzy, rage 2/day, rake +15 (1d4+4)

Abilities Str 28, Dex 15, Con 22, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 9
SQ illiteracy, speak with sharks
Feats Multiattack[B], Multiweapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (light pick), Weapon Focus (trident)
Skills Hide +5 (+9 underwater), Listen +7 (+11 underwater), Profession (hunter) +5, Spot +6 (+10 underwater), Survival +8, Swim +11
Possessions *+1 trident,* three masterwork light picks

Blindsense (Ex) A sahuagin's blindsense operates only in water.

Blood Frenzy (Ex) Once per day a sahuagin that takes damage in combat can fly into a frenzy in the following round, clawing and biting madly until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +2 Constitution and +2 Strength, and takes a –2 penalty to Armor Class. A sahuagin cannot end its frenzy voluntarily. The stats above include the frenzy already; if the sahuagin is not yet damaged see below.

When not in a blood frenzy, the sahuagin uses the following statistics.
AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15
(+2 Dex, +5 natural)
hp decrease by 6
Fort +9
Melee *+1 trident* +12/+7 (1d8+9) and 3 mwk coral picks +12 (1d4+3)
Grp +13
Atk Options rake +14 (1d4+3)
Abilities Str 26, Con 20
Skills Swim +10

Rake (Ex) A sahuagin gains two rake attacks when swimming.

Freshwater Sensitivity (Ex) A sahuagin fully immersed in fresh water must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or become fatigued. Even on a success, it must repeat the save attempt every 10 minutes it remains immersed.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds sahuagin for a round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

Speak with Sharks (Ex) Sahuagin can communicate telepathically with sharks up to 150 feet away. The communication is limited to fairly simple concepts such as "food," "danger," and "enemy." Sahuagin can use the Handle Animal skill to befriend and train sharks.

Skills A sahuagin has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. Underwater, a sahuagin has a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, and Spot checks.

11 Sahuagin **CR 2**

hp 13 (2 HD)

Male sahuagin
CE Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic)
Init +1; **Senses** blindsense 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6*, Spot +6*
Languages Sahuagin

AC 14, touch 9, flat-footed 13
(+1 Dex, +5 natural, –2 frenzy)
Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4
Weakness freshwater sensitivity, light blindness, water dependent

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Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee trident +5 (1d8+4) and
bite +3 (1d4+1) or
2 talons +5 (1d4+3) and
bite +3 (1d4+1) or
Ranged heavy crossbow +3 (1d10/19–20)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +5
Atk Options blood frenzy, rake +3 (1d4+2)

Abilities Str 18, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9
SQ speak with sharks
Feats Great Fortitude, Multiattack[B]
Skills Handle Animal +4, Hide +6*, Listen +6*, Profession (hunter) +1*, Ride +3, Spot +6*, Survival +1*
Possessions trident, heavy crossbow, 10 bolts, coral necklace

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Blindsense (Ex) A sahuagin's blindsense operates only in water.

Blood Frenzy (Ex) Once per day a sahuagin that takes damage in combat can fly into a frenzy in the following round, clawing and biting madly until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +2 Constitution and +2 Strength, and takes a –2 penalty to Armor Class. A sahuagin cannot end its frenzy voluntarily. The stats above include the frenzy already; if the sahuagin is not yet damaged see below.

When not in a blood frenzy, the sahuagin uses the following statistics.

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(+1 Dex, +5 natural)
hp decrease by 2
Fort +3
Melee trident +4 (1d8+3) and
bite +2 (1d4+1) or
Melee 2 talons +4 (1d4+2) and
bite +2 (1d4+1)
Grp +4
Atk Options rake +2 (1d4+1)
Abilities Str 16, Con 14

Rake (Ex) A sahuagin gains two rake attacks when swimming.

Freshwater Sensitivity (Ex) A sahuagin fully immersed in fresh water must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or become fatigued. Even on a success, it must repeat the save attempt every 10 minutes it remains immersed.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds sahuagin for a round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

Speak with Sharks (Ex) Sahuagin can communicate telepathically with sharks up to 150 feet away. The communication is limited to fairly simple concepts such as "food," "danger," and "enemy." Sahuagin can use the Handle Animal skill to befriend and train sharks.

Skills A sahuagin has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

*Underwater, a sahuagin has a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, and Spot checks.

TACTICS

The five visible sahuagin fire their crossbows and then leap into the two small pools, hoping to lure the PCs to them. The sahuagin hiding in the niche behind the hanging sharks waits there and then fires on the PCs when they try to traverse the room. The mutant and other two sahuagin beneath the water in the long pool ambush the PCs when they approach, leaping up out of the water and attacking. Once the mutant rises, the battle is joined in earnest and all other sahuagin close to melee, striving to surround the PCs and skewer them on their tridents. The sahuagin fight to the death.

DEVELOPMENT

If any of the sahuagin are taken alive, they speak feverishly to anyone who can understand them about "The Chosen One! The Drinker of Blood! The Devourer on Earth!" and say nothing else of use.

CONCLUSION

At the bottom of the long pool lies the rotting corpse of a dwarven artificer who came down to explore this cave and was torn apart by the sahuagin. His *+1 battle axe* and his *+2 gloves of Dexterity* lay with him.

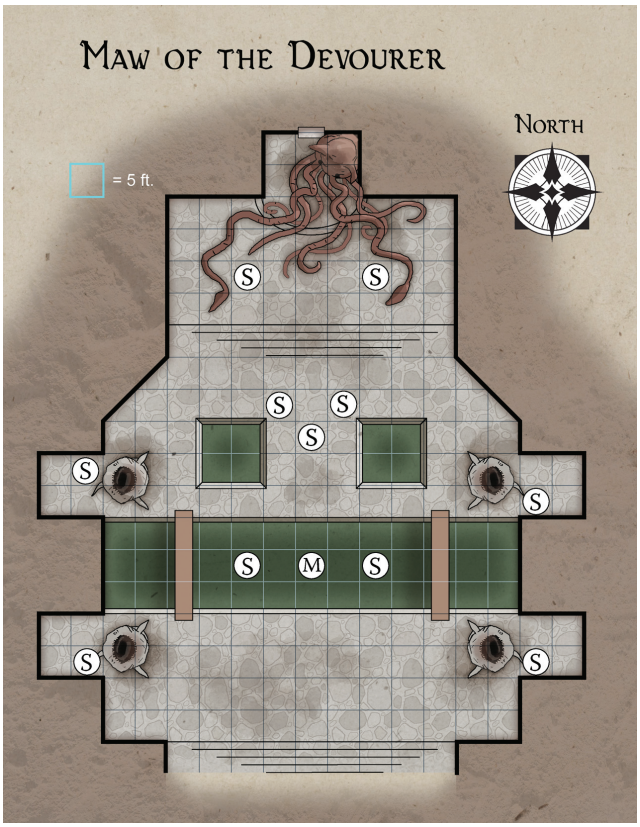
Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Pools: All of the pools here are 50 feet deep.

Dead Squid: This decaying monstrosity is harmless, though the squares where its tentacles lay are considered difficult terrain. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter any square. The tentacles add 5 to the DC of Balance and Tumble checks, and 2 to the DC of Move Silently checks.

Illumination: The lights in the area provide shadowy illumination.



Slaughter Beach

Encounter Level 13

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map when they enter.

- Kaardral (K)
- Sahuagin (S)

When the PCs enter this area, read:

An underground tide pool of considerable size laps at the northern quarter of this chamber, and a beach of coarse sand fills the majority of the cave. The stench of rot is thick in the air, and two gigantic carcasses of slaughtered whales lay beached and gutted here. The sand is soaked in their gore, crimson and squishing grotesquely underfoot.

At the center of the cave, the bloody sand whirls and circles in the air, taking on a vaguely humanoid shape composed of little more than gore and sand. The thing screams out in rage and reaches out toward you with giant clawed hands of living bloody sand.

KAARDRAL — CR 11

LM 110, 123
hp 51 (7 HD); **DR** 5/—

Male elf swarm-shifter mummy cleric 7
LE Medium undead
Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +7, Spot +7
Languages Elven, Giant

AC 23, touch 13, flat-footed 23; *entropic shield* (+10 natural, +3 deflection)
Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage
Fort +6, **Ref** +3, **Will** +12
Weakness fire vulnerability

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee slam +19/+14/+9 (1d6+16) [*desecrate*]
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +17
Atk Options despair, mummy rot, spells
Spells Prepared (CL 7th):
4th—*shadow conjuration*[D] (DC 20), *divine power, poison* (DC 22)
3rd—*animate dead, bestow curse* (DC 21), *deeper darkness*[D], *dispel magic*
2nd—*bull's strength, darkness*[D, desecrate] (2), *hold person* (DC 18), *owl's wisdom*
1st—*bane* (DC 17), *command* (DC 17), *entropic shield, obscuring mist*[D], *protection from good, shield of faith* (2)
0—*detect magic, inflict minor wounds, mending, read magic, resistance, virtue*
D: Domain spell. Deity: The Shadow. Domains: Magic, Shadow

Abilities Str 30, Dex 10, Con —, Int 12, Wis 22, Cha 16
SQ hive mind, rebuke/command undead 6/day (+3, 2d6+10, 7th), swarm form (sand)
Feats Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Improved Initiative, Spell Focus (necromancy), Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Bluff +5, Concentration +6, Disguise +5, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +2, Spot +8

Despair (Su) At the mere sight of a mummy, the viewer must succeed on a DC 16 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected by the same mummy's despair ability for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Hive Mind (Ex) A swarm shifter with this ability is immune to any spell or effect that targets a specific number of creatures (including single-target spells such as disintegrate), with the exception of effects that command, control, turn, rebuke, bolster or destroy undead specifically. A swarm-shifter in swarm form is affected by run and rebuke attempts just like the base creature.

Mummy Rot (Su) Supernatural disease—slam, Fortitude DC 16, incubation period 1 minute, damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha. The save DC is Charisma-based. Unlike normal diseases, mummy rot continues until the victim reaches Constitution 0 (and dies) or is cured as described below. Mummy rot is a powerful curse, not a natural disease. A character attempting to cast any conjuration (healing) spell on a creature afflicted with mummy rot must succeed on a DC 20 caster level check, or the spell has no effect on the afflicted character. To eliminate mummy rot, the curse must first be broken with *break enchantment* or *remove curse* (requiring a DC 20 caster level check for either spell), after which a caster level check is no longer necessary to cast healing spells on the victim, and the mummy rot can be magically cured as any normal disease. An afflicted creature who dies of mummy rot shrivels away into sands and dust that blow away into nothing at the first wind.

Swarm Form (Su) Kaardral can take the form of an undead swarm of sand at will. Changing to or from the

form is a standard action that infuses the undead with negative energy that heals Kaardral 7 hit points. Kaardral is cursed so that he must concentrate to maintain his standard humanoid form. Assuming his standard form requires a DC 20 Concentration check, and once he has assumed this form he must succeed on a DC 15 Concentration check every round or he crumbles away to sand once more. Kaardral cannot change into his normal form in an area where his body could not fit. As with the *alter self* spell, Kaardral's items (though he has none) would be absorbed into his body in swarm form and grant him no effects. If Kaardral takes enough damage to destroy him in his swarm form he is destroyed. See below for details on Kaardral in swarm form.

Swarm Form (undead sand)
Speed fly 60 ft. (120 squares, perfect)
Immune to Weapon Damage (Ex) Weapon attacks are useless against Kaardral in this form.

Note: Kaardral cannot attack or cast spells in his swarm form, nor can he affect a creature with despair or mummy rot.

4 Sahuagin — CR 2

hp 13 (2 HD)

Male sahuagin
CE Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic)
Init +1; **Senses** blindsense 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6*, Spot +6*
Languages Sahuagin

AC 14, touch 9, flat-footed 13
(+1 Dex, +5 natural, –2 frenzy)
Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4
Weakness freshwater sensitivity, light blindness, water dependent

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 60 ft. (12 squares)
Melee trident +5 (1d8+4) and
bite +3 (1d4+1) or
2 talons +5 (1d4+3) and
bite +3 (1d4+1) or
Ranged heavy crossbow +3 (1d10/19–20)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +5
Atk Options blood frenzy, rake +3 (1d4+2)

Abilities Str 18, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9
SQ speak with sharks
Feats Great Fortitude, Multiattack[B]
Skills Handle Animal +4, Hide +6*, Listen +6*, Profession (hunter) +1*, Ride +3, Spot +6*, Survival +1*
Possessions trident, heavy crossbow, 10 bolts, coral necklace

Blindsense (Ex) A sahuagin's blindsense operates only in water.
Blood Frenzy (Ex) Once per day a sahuagin that takes damage in combat can fly into a frenzy in the following round, clawing and biting madly until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +2 Constitution and +2 Strength, and takes a –2 penalty to Armor Class. A sahuagin cannot end its frenzy voluntarily. The stats above include the frenzy already; if the sahuagin is not yet damaged see below.
AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(+1 Dex, +5 natural)
hp decrease by 2
Fort +3
Melee trident +4 (1d8+3) and
bite +2 (1d4+1) or
Melee 2 talons +4 (1d4+2) and
bite +2 (1d4+1)
Grp +4
Atk Options rake +2 (1d4+1)
Abilities Str 16, Con 14
Rake (Ex) A sahuagin gains two rake attacks when swimming.
Freshwater Sensitivity (Ex) A sahuagin fully immersed in fresh water must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or become fatigued. Even on a success, it must repeat the save attempt every 10 minutes it remains immersed.
Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds sahuagin for a round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.
Speak with Sharks (Ex) Sahuagin can communicate telepathically with sharks up to 150 feet away. The communication is limited to fairly simple concepts such as "food," "danger," and "enemy." Sahuagin can use the Handle Animal skill to befriend and train sharks.
Skills A sahuagin has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.
*Underwater, a sahuagin has a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, and Spot checks.

Whale Skeleton — CR 6

hp 91 (14 HD); **DR** 5/bludgeoning

NE Gargantuan undead
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

AC 14, touch 8, flat-footed 12
(–2 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural)
Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, cold, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage
Fort +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +10

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee bite +16 (4d6+13) and
2 claws +11 (2d6+7)
tail slap +11 (1d8+7) [desecrate]
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +31

Abilities Str 35, Dex 15, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1
Feats Improved Initiative

TACTICS

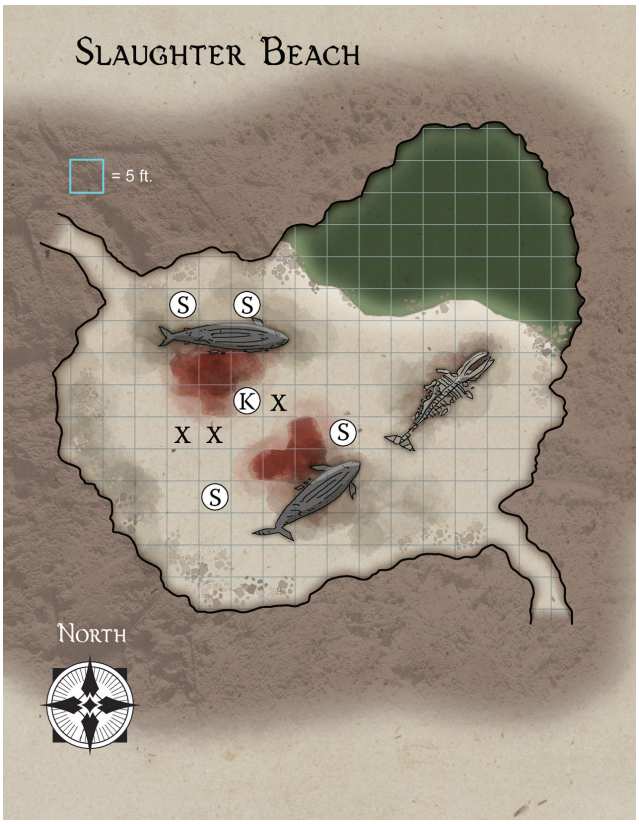
As soon as Kaardral sensed the sounds of combat from Encounter 7, he cast *divine power*, *protection from good*, *entropic shield*, and *shield of faith* on himself. Kaardral roars in anger, ordering his sahuagin soldiers to attack. He then spends the first round of combat casting *animate dead* on the rotting whale corpses (he already affixed the black gemstones in their eye sockets in case of intrusions such as this). The whale flesh and blubber melts into putrescence and forms bubbling pools in the sand. The gigantic skeletons drag themselves through the sand to attack the PCs. Kaardral constitutes himself when he can, hurling spells at the party or slamming them into submission. If reduced to fewer than 20 hit points, he breaks down into a cloud of bloody sand and flees, surging into the tide of the underwater pool and washing away . . . for now.

DEVELOPMENT

If Kaardral isn't defeated here, he most likely returns to seek his vengeance on the PCs, especially if they undertake a quest to destroy his mask once and for all. Kaardral wants nothing more than to be reunited with his artifact, and he most likely finds a quiet place to feed on blood until he can reconstitute his form at will, so as better to face the PCs in the future. Kaardral makes an excellent re-occurring nemesis since he only grows in power as he feeds, and once he is made solid again, he is a substantial threat to the PCs even after they gain a few more levels. You should consider adding more levels to him as time passes—his past knowledge of necromancy may lead him to take up that area of pursuit yet again.

CONCLUSION

Reward the PCs only 75% of the XP they should earn for defeating Kaardral since his accursed condition makes it impossible for him to use weapons and equipment as well as causes him to revert to sand form against his will at inopportune times.



Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Desecrate: This entire area is under the effect of Kaardral's *desecrate* effect (figured into his and the whale skeletons' stat blocks above). Turning checks made here suffer a –4.

Bloody Splotches and Sahuagin Husks: Sand that is mired in blood is considered difficult terrain, and the exsanguinated husks of sahuagin underfoot invoke the same difficult terrain penalty on anyone passing through their squares. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter any square. The husks and sand add 5 to the DC of Balance and Tumble checks, and 2 to the DC of Move Silently checks.

Illumination: The lights in the area provide shadowy illumination.

Stirge's Den

Encounter Level 10

SETUP

Place the PCs on the map when they enter. Do not place the Stirge until he's spotted or otherwise detected.

- The Stirge (S)

When the PCs detect the Stirge, or when he reveals himself by attacking, read:

A man spins from the shadows, swirling in a cloud of veils and scarves of red and black. A horrific mask of blood-spattered darkwood obscures his face—it has long proboscises for eyes and a maw of jagged teeth that jut freakishly outward from the mask. The masked man moves almost faster than the eye can follow as he whirls and lashes out with fists and feet.

The Stirge **CR 10**

hp 83 (35 temporary, 48 actual)

Male human ex-monk 4/rogue 5
CE Medium humanoid (human)
Init +10; **Senses** see in darkness, *see invisible*; Listen +9, Spot +9
Languages Common, Elven

AC 20, touch 20, flat-footed 14; Deflect Arrows, Dodge, uncanny dodge
(+6 Dex, +4 Wisdom)
Fort +6, **Ref** +14, **Will** +9; improved evasion, still mind (+2 against mind-affecting effects)

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), slow fall 20 ft.
Melee unarmed +6/+6 (1d8+3) and bite +1 (1d8+3 and blood drain)
Ranged *+2 frost shuriken* +12/+12/+7 (1d2+3 and 1d6 cold)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +11
Atk Options Improved Grapple, Stunning Fist, *ki* strike (magic), flurry of blows, sneak attack +3d6
Spells-like Abilities (CL 12th):
1/day—*heal*
3/day—*hold person* (DC 18), *invisibility, vampiric touch* (+10 touch)
Abilities Str 13, Dex 23, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 18, Cha 12
SQ trap sense +1, trapfinding
Feats Acrobatic, Deflect Arrows[B], Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Stunning Fist[B], Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (unarmed)
Skills Balance +16, Bluff +6, Climb +7, Escape Artist +14, Hide +15, Jump +15, Listen +9, Move Silently +14, Perform (acrobatics) +7, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9, Tumble +19
Possessions combat gear plus the *Blood Mask, +2 amulet of mighty fists*

Blood Drain (Su) The *Blood Mask* allows its bearer to drain the blood of a grappled foe, inflicting 1d6 points of Con damage per round the hold is maintained. The wearer heals 5 hit points per point of Con drained, and gains temporary hit points over his maximum if he is undamaged. These temporary hit points persist for 1 hour.

TACTICS

The Stirge casts *invisibility* on himself as soon as he detects enemies without and feeds on two living captives, draining both dry (thus accounting for his temporary hit points above). The Stirge then waits beyond the secret door as noted on the map, where he watches through a peephole. Once the PCs begin exploring the room, the Stirge sneak attacks and then disappears into a secret door again at the next opportunity, ideally dragging a downed PC with him and draining her dry. The Stirge continues to use hit-and-run tactics, during which he employs his spell-like abilities, hurls shuriken, and otherwise whittles foes down before he makes a full assault. The Mask has no intention of being captured and if the Stirge is reduced to fewer than 20 hit points, it tries to escape.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs learned how to separate the Mask from the Stirge, and do so here, the cat burglar is set free and is very disoriented. He remembers nothing of his week-long killing spree and breaks down if confronted with his crimes.

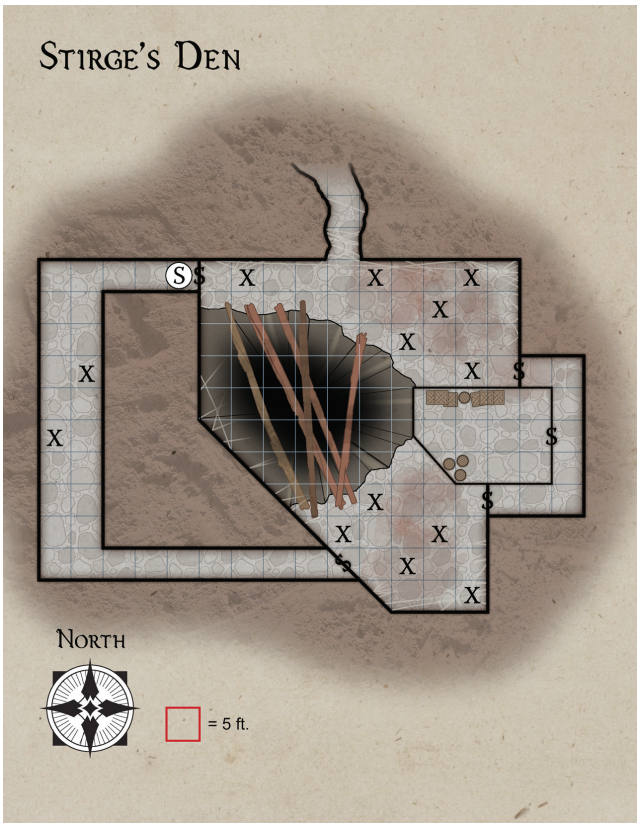
CONCLUSION

Grant the PCs an extra 1,000 experience point story award if they free the Stirge from the Mask without killing him (in addition to full experience points for this encounter).

Features of the Area

The area has the following features.

Illumination: The lights in the area provide shadowy illumination.



Night of the Straw Men

A Side Trek for 1st-level PCs

"Night of the Straw Men" is a Dungeons & Dragons Side Trek for 1st-level player characters (PCs). This scenario is designed to be open-ended to the extreme: You must choose the ultimate antagonist if he decides to build upon the adventuring and roleplaying opportunities offered by this Side Trek's main encounter. This piece works best, when fleshed out a bit by you, as a springboard for fledgling heroes to take on even grander and nobler quests.

This adventure uses a monster that appeared in Dragon Magazine #355—a scarecrow—but its full stats are reprinted herein.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The superstitious folk of the hamlet of Steeplefall and the surrounding countryside celebrate a strange holiday called the Day of the Straw Men. All day, each villager carries around a small, crude, humanoid figure crafted from straw, whispering to it the sins he or she committed during the past year. At dusk, the villagers gather in the town square and throw their dolls into a bonfire, burning away the sins to either make a fresh start of things or make room for another year's worth of debauchery (depending upon one's personal outlook). Penitents then often meet with a village priest (to discuss spiritual matters) and/or the mayor (for more secular concerns), both of whom sit in chairs atop a raised wooden platform not far from the bonfire. Most of this is common knowledge, and the villagers freely explain the custom to outsiders. Thus, a PC may learn all the above details with a mere DC 3 Gather Information or Knowledge (local) check.

This year's celebration is crashed by a most frightful and uninvited guest: a scarecrow who makes an ominous statement before attacking savagely. Who or what created the pumpkin-headed construct and why

it was sent to attack the priest are matters left to your discretion, but some suggestions are provided in the "Concluding the Adventure" section.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This Side Trek doesn't have adventure hooks per se—the PCs happen to be in Steeplefall on a local holiday. A deadly plot comes to fruition that night, and the PCs can either intervene or stay clear of the conflict as they see fit. The PCs might act heroically and step up to thwart the scarecrow attack, but more mercenary PCs might require motivation to get involved.

A village priest—Yanov Letru—is the target of the scarecrow's assault, so it behooves you to give the players some reason to care what happens to the man. If the heroes arrive in town fresh off another adventure, Yanov might heal any lingering wounds or ask to see any treasures they might wish to sell. Alternatively, the priest might approach the party saying that he has a potential mission to offer the group, which he'll detail the following day (since he's too busy preparing for his holiday duties currently; the actual mission is left for you to provide.

There's one simple hook that is almost guaranteed to at least get the heroes into the town square (if not step up and battle the scarecrow): a venerable villager hands a PC her straw man and asks that he or she take it to the bonfire after dark and burn it since she's too feeble to walk there herself.

CHAPTER ONE: DAY OF THE STRAW MEN

This Side Trek focuses on a single encounter that takes place shortly after sunset on the unusual holiday known as the Day of the Straw Men, but you are encouraged to flesh out the day-long celebration with a few other noncombat events to help the PCs better understand the nature of the holiday, interact with a few of the locals, and just plain enjoy a bit of down time between adventures.

The PCs should witness this occurrence early in the day to get a better sense of the holiday and its rituals:

At a small booth near the edge of the marketplace, a merchant and customer conclude a deal. The buyer skulks away with his purchase while the grinning merchant pockets his coins. For a moment the seller's predatory smile falters and he pulls a small straw doll out from underneath the counter, mumbling a few words to it before dropping it out of sight again.

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Instantly, his grin returns with a vengeance as he awaits his next victim/customer. . . .

Or perhaps they see this instead (or after some time has passed from the text above):

A teenaged boy and girl rendezvous just inside the mouth of a narrow alley, holding hands, whispering, and giggling. A younger boy races up to the older, grabs his arm, and tries to drag him away from the girl.

"C'mon!" the little lad whines. "Pa's gonna be mad! You're supposed to be buying vegetables. Whatcha doing with her?"

The teenaged lovers both blush deeply, say quick goodbyes, and reluctantly go their separate ways, taking a moment to whisper something to a tiny straw doll each carries.

In addition to the interludes like the pair above, you might choose to add a few other minor encounters to the adventure to fill out the PCs' day. Five such scenarios are outlined below. Only the first—the meeting with the priest Yanov Letru—is instrumental to the adventure.

1. The Priest's Proposal: Yanov Letru (fully detailed in Tactical Encounter A1) sees the PCs in town and recognizes them as adventurers. He greets them warmly, fills them in on the Day of the Straw Men if necessary, and tries to set up a meeting with the group the following morning at Olivar's Inn. Yanov hints that he has a mission or business proposal he'd like to discuss, but he's too busy tending to a couple of sick villagers and preparing for the holiday's ceremonies to detail it any earlier. (The mission is left to your discretion and might lead to a further adventure. This encounter's main purpose, however, is to give the heroes a reason to step in when the scarecrow attacks Letru that night.)

2. The Fortuneteller: See area A4 for more details.

3. The Lost Child: A young child is lost, and the parents are frantic. This situation might be remedied by something as simple as a DC 15 Spot check to notice the missing child amongst the crowd in the village square or as involved as tracking the child's footprints to a small stretch of woodlands north of town.

4. The Pickpocket: A 1st-level rogue named Renfaldo works the crowd in and around the village square, using his Sleight of Hand skill to pick pockets and lift unattended items. This scoundrel might target a PC, or one of the PCs could have an opportunity to make a Spot check to notice a theft from another victim. Renfaldo is ill-prepared for combat and attempts to flee if possible, making good use of his Run feat.

RENFALDO **CR 1**

hp 7 (1 HD)

Male human rogue 1
NE Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4
Languages Common, Goblin, Orc

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10
(+2 Dex)
Fort +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares); Run
Melee mwk dagger +2 (1d4+1/19–20) or
Melee unarmed strike +1 (1d3+1, nonlethal)
Base Atk +0; **Grp** +1
Atk Options sneak attack +1d6

Abilities Str 12, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 8
SQ trapfinding
Feats Run, Skill Focus (Sleight of Hand)
Skills Appraise +6, Bluff +3, Disguise +3, Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Open Lock +6, Search +6, Sleight of Hand +9, Spot +4
Possessions masterwork dagger, thieves' tools; 12 sp, 28 cp, and a crude silver necklace (5 gp value) stolen from locals; rapier, studded leather armor, potion of cure light wounds, 40 gp in his rented room at Olivar's Inn

5. The Archery Contest: A local bowyer (retired half-elf male ranger 2 named Jannek) sponsors an archery contest. First prize is a masterwork longbow the ranger crafted himself.

THE HEART OF STEEPLEFALL

Steeplefall (Hamlet): Conventional; AL N; 100 gp limit; Assets 1,050 gp; Population 210; Mixed (human 92%, halfling 5%, gnome 1%, half-elf 1%, half-orc 1%).

Authority Figure: Mayor Olbrad Treska (N male human aristocrat 3).

Important Characters: Gregor Tavaros (NG male human cleric 3) and his assistant Yanov Letru (NG male human cleric 1) run the local church dedicated to Ehlonna; Pollaeus Kestellar (LN male human warrior 3) is both Steeplefall's constable and militia leader; Jannek Silverthistle (NG male half-elf ranger 2) is a bowyer, hunter, and guide-for-hire; Olivar Stelkov (N male human commoner 2) runs the hamlet's only inn and is a respected citizen and good source for rumors and information; Laurallus Bralithon (N male human cleric 3) heads a newer church dedicated to St. Cuthbert that stands near the eastern edge of the village.

A1. THE VILLAGE SQUARE

The following describes this area during the day:

The village square in Steeplefall might usually function as its marketplace, but on this day the vendors have been pushed to the fringes of the area. A raised wooden platform has been erected near the western edge of the square, and two stout chairs rest upon it. It currently serves as a stage for a lute-strumming minstrel and an impromptu dance floor for a handful of young locals.

In the center of the square, some older villagers are slowly building up a great pile of wood, apparently for a bonfire. Jugglers and other entertainers pass through the area, performing for a few copper pieces the crowd tosses their way.

When the PCs return to this area at night after the bonfire has been lit, Tactical Encounter A1 is triggered.

A2. THE OLD CHURCH

When the PCs near the church, read:

This low stone building sits north of the village square, and the vendors' carts and holiday revelers seem to keep a respectful distance from it. A large likeness of a holy symbol is carved into the wooden double doors that serve as an entrance.

This humble church is dedicated to Ehlonna or a similar nature-themed god. It has two priests—Gregor Tavaros (a cleric 3 currently away on church business) and Yanov Letru (cleric 1)—who serve mainly the hamlet's farmers, hunters, and trappers.

A3. OLIVAR'S INN

When the PCs approach the inn, read:

This two-story stone and wood edifice is among the largest buildings in the village. The creaky wooden sign hanging near the door proclaims this place to be Olivar's Inn and promises "Good Food & Drink" and "Warm Beds." A small stable is located just north of the inn.

The only inn in Steeplefall, this establishment is run by the paunchy Olivar (commoner 2), his equally stout wife Hannah (commoner 1), and their two plain daughters, Hilda and Vera (both commoner 1s). For most holidays and festivals, Olivar rolls kegs of beer and casks of wine out into the town square and sells drinks to revelers there.

A4. EDNEA'S TENT

When the PCs near the tent, read:

This colorful patchwork tent has a variety of stringed beads, dangling charms, and other strange tokens hanging near its entrance. A hand-painted sign outside indicates that "Ednea: Mistress of Mysteries & Fortuneteller Extraordinaire" waits within.

An elderly woman named Ednea (commoner 1) offers her services for a single copper piece. She may read a person's fortune in his palm, in his tea leaves, by the bumps on his head, or via a card picked from a weathered deck. The accuracy of Ednea's predictions is left to your discretion; she might render a mystical telling that foreshadows the scarecrow's attack that night or, seeing a group of heavily armed and armored outsiders (the PCs) in her village, might instead invent a reading that foresees deadly consequences for the heroes should they cause trouble or get into any sort of altercation over the next day or two.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Should Yanov Letru survive the scarecrow's assault, he sincerely thanks any PCs who came to his aid, spontaneously converting remaining spells to heal injured heroes. You could contrive to have Yanov offer his rescuers a handful of low-level potions (such as *cure light wounds*) from his church's stores or promise future spellcasting services as needed, especially if they accept the priest's proposed mission the following day. Mayor Olbrad might even throw in a small monetary reward (25 gp) to each hero who stepped up to battle the scarecrow.

Letru's mysterious mission makes for an obvious hook to expand and continue this adventure. Another possibility revolves around the scarecrow's secret master. Who is he and why did he have his construct minion attack Letru? Could the attack be linked to the mission Letru plans to reveal to the PCs? Or could it perhaps be related to the reason why Letru's superior, Gregor, is out of town? The answer is in your hands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen's only published works have all been in *Dungeon Magazine*, though it's been twelve years (Yikes!) since his last Side Trek. He'd like to make shout-outs to the classic **Mystara** game world (original home of the Day of the Straw Men holiday) and to his playtesters: Kirk, Patrick, and Paul. He lives in Massachusetts.

The Bigger the Sin. . . .

Encounter Level 3

SETUP

The scarecrow begins this encounter hidden beneath the hay in the wagon parked near the stables. Its mysterious creator—cloaked and disguised—whispers an order to kill the priest and then quickly departs the square. The scarecrow, however, arises and makes a beeline for Yanov, taking the dotted path shown on the map unless it meets with stiff resistance.

This particular scarecrow has a magic mouth spell cast on it, enabling it to address its intended victim as it draws near.

The priest Letru and Mayor Olbrad are on the raised platform at the western edge of the square. Dozens of villagers are gathered in the center of town for the Straw Men ritual. The PCs can begin almost anywhere on the map.

- Scarecrow (S)
- Letru (L)
- Mayor Olbrad (O)
- Villagers (V)

When the PCs visit the village square after dusk, read:

Most of the citizens of Steeplefall are gathered to celebrate the holiday. Some watch a variety of entertainers (jugglers, minstrels, fortunetellers, puppeteers, and the like) along the fringes of the square, while others are gathered in and around Olivar's Inn to the east, where the proprietor has rolled kegs of beer and casks of wine and cider outside to sell drinks to anyone who has a cup, flagon, or waterskin. More have congregated around the blazing bonfire in the center of the square, chatting, warming themselves by the fire, or dropping their little straw men into the roaring flames. To the west a growing line has formed of townsfolk who wish to speak briefly with the village priest and/or mayor, both of whom sit on chairs atop a raised platform there.

When the scarecrow emerges from hiding and moves to slay the priest, read:

A disturbance ripples through the crowd and panicked townsfolk part to let someone through. Judged solely by its shabby clothes and herky-jerky gait, the party-crasher might be mistaken for the village drunk, but the causer of this ruckus has a carved pumpkin atop its shoulders! Inside the orange gourd, a mystical flame dances madly.

Pointing to the priest on the platform, the living scarecrow shrieks, "The bigger the sin, the bigger the straw man! I am your straw man, priest—living testament to the number and gravity of your sins!" The creature approaches the platform unchallenged while the mayor leaps off the side and runs for his life.

Scarecrow **CR 3**

hp 47 (5 HD); **DR** 5/slashing or bludgeoning

Always N Medium construct
Init +5; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +4
Aura unsettling presence (60 ft., DC 12)
Languages understands creator's orders; magic mouth

AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14
(+4 natural)
Immune cold, construct immunities, cannot be flanked
Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1
Weakness vulnerability to fire

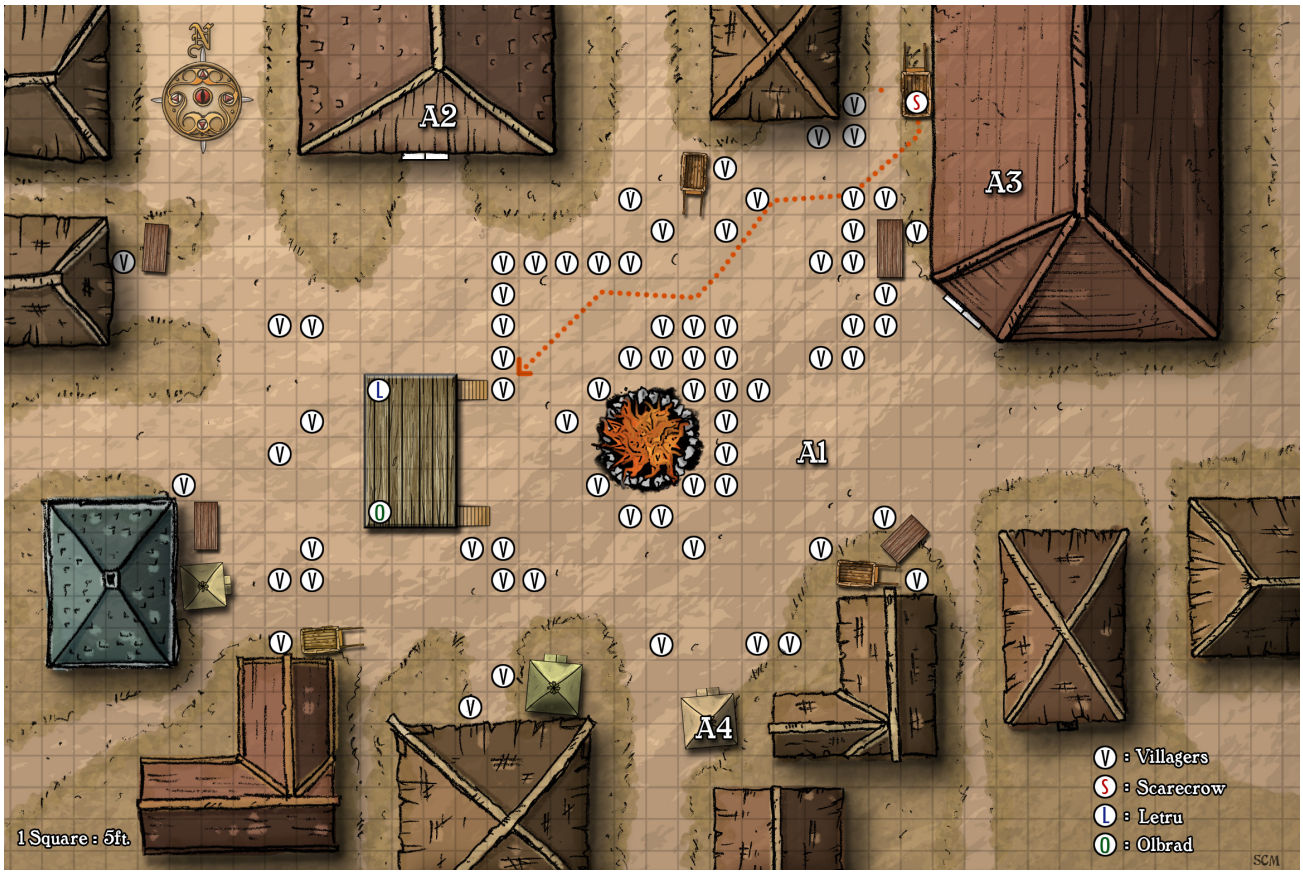
Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee 2 claws +5 (1d6+2 plus cowering touch)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +5
Special Actions cowering gaze, cowering touch

Abilities Str 15, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 10
SQ camouflage, construct traits
Feats —
Skills Listen +0, Search +4, Spot +4
Advancement 6–10 HD (Medium); 11–15 HD (Large)

All-Around Vision (Ex) A scarecrow's rotating head gives it a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks, and it can't be flanked.

Unsettling Presence (Su) A scarecrow can unsettle foes with its mere presence. The ability takes effect automatically whenever it attacks. Creatures within a 60-foot radius with fewer HD than the scarecrow must succeed on a DC 12 Will saving throw or become shaken for 2d6 rounds. A creature that succeeds at this save remains immune to the scarecrow's unsettling presence for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Cowering Gaze (Su) Once per round, as a standard action, a scarecrow can focus its gaze on one creature within 40 feet. Any intelligent humanoid that meets the scarecrow's gaze must succeed on a DC 12 Will



saving throw or cower for 2d4 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Cowering Touch (Su) If a scarecrow hits with a claw attack, the victim must succeed on a DC 12 Will saving throw or cower for 1d4 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Camouflage (Ex) Since an animated scarecrow looks like an ordinary scarecrow when at rest, it takes a DC 20 Spot check to notice anything unusual before it attacks. Anyone with ranks in Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (nature) can use one of those skills instead of Spot to notice the scarecrow.

Skills A scarecrow has a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks.

Yanov Letru — CR 1

hp 10 (1 HD)

Male human cleric 1
NG Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2
Languages Common

AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10
Fort +4, **Ref** +2, **Will** +4

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee light mace +1 (1d6+1)
Base Atk +0; **Grp** +1

Special Actions spontaneous healing, turn undead 4/day (+1, 2d6+2, 1st)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 1st):
1st—bless, protection from evil[D] (CL 2nd), shield of faith
0—create water, light, mending
D: Domain spell. Deity: Ehlonna. Domains: Good, Plant

Abilities Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 15, Cha 13
Feats Combat Casting, Lightning Reflexes
Skills Concentration +6 (+10 casting defensively, grappling, or pinned), Heal +4, Knowledge (religion) +1, Listen +2, Spot +2
Possessions light mace, silver holy symbol, 2 sp, 11 cp

TACTICS

The scarecrow has a solitary goal: to kill the village priest, Yanov Letru. As soon as it gets within 40 feet of the priest, the scarecrow uses its cowering gaze ability on Letru; then it closes for the kill. If anyone steps between it and its prey, the scarecrow counts on its cowering gaze to neutralize the threat and keeps moving toward the priest, even if this provokes attacks of opportunity against it.

SCARECROW LORE

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (arcana) can learn more about scarecrows. When a character makes a successful skill check, the following lore is revealed, including the information from lower DCs.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANA)

DC	Result
13	This is an animated scarecrow, a mindless construct. This reveals all construct traits.
18	Both a scarecrow's gaze and touch have a power that causes victims to cower in fear.
23	A scarecrow can remain perfectly motionless to appear mundane, and it can rotate its head fully to see in any direction.
28	Scarecrows sometimes gain consciousness and hunt living beings. Others can be crafted with special powers to track and slay a chosen victim.

Yanov stands his ground, not wanting innocents to be targeted by the scarecrow. He casts *shield of faith* on himself and prepares to face his foe. If the PCs join the battle on his behalf, he also tries to cast *bless*.

DEVELOPMENT

Should the scarecrow succeed in killing Letru, it becomes free-willed and immediately turns its assault on the nearest living being. It now switches tactics and concentrates its attacks on anyone who dares oppose it. If it is unengaged, the scarecrow begins to ruthlessly pummel nearby cowering victims.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The village square has the following features.

Illumination: The blazing bonfire provides the equivalent lighting of a daylight spell: bright illumination in a 60-foot radius and shadowy illumination out to 120 feet.

Bonfire: Anyone entering (or bull rushed into) any of the bonfire squares takes 1d6 points of fire damage and must make a successful DC 15 Reflex save or catch fire. Burning creatures and their flammable items take an additional 1d6 points of fire damage each round until they succeed on a DC 15 Reflex save, totally immerse themselves in water, or otherwise extinguish the flames. See "Catching on Fire" (*DMG* 303–304) for full details.

A PC might use a burning branch or piece of wood from the bonfire to battle the scarecrow. Such a makeshift weapon should be treated like a torch—a one-handed improvised weapon (–4 penalty on attack rolls) that deals bludgeoning damage (1d2 for Small creatures; 1d3 for Medium ones) plus 1 point of fire damage.

Note that a scarecrow has a vulnerability to fire and thus takes an extra 50% damage from fire effects.

Crowd: The gathered crowd parts swiftly for the attacking scarecrow, surging as far from it as possible. PCs trying to move against the crowd cannot run but may attempt a DC 10 Dexterity check to move their full speed through the gathered villagers; those who fail this check may move at one half normal speed.

One or more PCs may also attempt to direct the crowd with either a Diplomacy check (DC 15; full-round action) or an Intimidate check (DC 20; free action). Success on either checks results in an open path to the scarecrow.

Raised Platform: The platform is 3 feet high. It can be accessed by stairs at its northeast and southeast corners or with a successful DC 12 Jump check. It provides a +1 attack roll modifier (higher ground) on melee attacks against creatures on the ground.